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KING ARTHUR.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

THE NEW TIMON.

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PREFACE.

In prefixing to this poem a brief explanation of its design, I feel myself involuntarily compelled to refer to the more popular distinctions of Epic Fable, though I do not thereby presume to arrogate to my work that title of Epic which Time alone has the prerogative to confer.

Pope has, accurately and succinctly, defined the three cardinal divisions of Epic Fable to consist in the Probable, the Allegorical, and the Marvellous. For the Probable is indispensable to the vital interest of the action, the Marvellous is the obvious domain of creative invention, and the Allegorical is the most pleasing mode of insinuating some subtler truth, or clothing some profounder moral.

I accept these divisions because they conform to the simplest principles of rational criticism; and though their combination does not form an Epic, it serves at least to amplify the region and elevate the objects of Romance.

It has been my aim so to blend these divisions, that each may harmonize with the other, and all conduce to the end proposed from the commencement. I have admitted but little episodical incident, and none that does not grow out of what Pope terms 'the platform of the story.' For the marvellous agencies I have not presumed to make direct use of that Divine Machinery which the war of the Christian Principle with the forms of Heathenism might have suggested to the sublime daring of Milton, had he prosecuted his original idea of founding a heroic poem upon the legendary existence of Arthur;—and, on the other hand, the Teuton Mythology, however imaginative and profound, is too unfamiliar and obscure, to permit its employment as an open and visible agency;—such reference to it as occurs, is therefore rather admitted as an appropriate colouring to the composition, than made an integral part of the materials of the canvas: And, not to ask from the ordinary reader an erudition I should have no right to expect, the reference so made is in the simplest form, and disentangled from the necessity of other information than a few brief notes will suffice to afford.

In taking my subject from chivalrous romance, I take, then, those agencies from the Marvellous which chivalrous romance naturally and familiarly affords—the Fairy, the Genius, the Enchanter: not wholly, indeed, in the precise and literal spirit with which our nursery tales receive those creations of Fancy through the medium of French Fabliaux, but in the larger significations by which, in their conceptions of the Supernatural, our fathers often implied the secrets of Nature. For the Romance from which I borrow is the Romance of the

North—a Romance, like the Northern mythology, full of typical meaning and latent import. The gigantic remains of symbol worship are visible amidst the rude fables of the Scandinavians, and what little is left to us of the earlier and more indigenous literature of the Cymrians, is characterized by a mysticism profound with parable. This fondness for an interior or double meaning is the most prominent attribute in that Romance popularly called The Gothic, the feature most in common with all creations that bear the stamp of the Northern fancy; we trace it in the poems of the Anglo-Saxons; it returns to us, in our earliest poems after the Conquest; it does not *originate* in the Oriental genius (immemorially addicted to Allegory,) but it instinctively *appropriates* all that Saracenic invention can suggest to the more sombre imagination of the North—it unites to the Serpent of the Edda, the flying Griffin of Arabia, the Persian Genius to the Scandinavian Trold,—and wherever it accepts a marvel, it seeks to insinuate a type. This peculiarity, which distinguishes the spiritual essence of the modern from the sensual character of ancient poetry, especially the Roman, is visible wherever a tribe allied to the Goth, the Frank, or the Teuton, carries with it the deep mysteries of the Christian faith. Even in sunny Provence it transfuses a subtler and graver moral into the lays of the joyous troubadour*,—and weaves "The Dance of Death" by the joyous streams, and through the glowing orange

* "Rien n'est plus commun dans la poésie provençale que l'allégorie; seulement elle est un jeu d'esprit au lieu d'être une action. . . . . Une autre analogie me parait plus spontanée qu'imitée—la poésie des troubadours qu'on suppose frivole, a souvent retracée des sentiments graves et touchants," &c.—VILLEMAIN, *Tableau du Moyen Age.*

groves, of Spain. Onwards, this under current of meaning flowed, through the various phases of civilisation:—it pervaded alike the popular Satire and the dramatic Mystery;—and, preserving its thoughtful calm amidst all the stirring passions that agitated mankind in the age subsequent to the Reformation, not only suffused the luxuriant fancy of the dreamy Spenser, but communicated to the practical intellect of Shakespere that subtle and recondite wisdom which seems the more inexhaustible the more it is examined, and suggests to every new inquirer some new problem in the philosophy of Human Life. Thus, in taking from Northern Romance the Marvellous, we are most faithful to the genuine character of that Romance, when we take with the Marvellous its old companion, the Typical or Allegorical. But these form only two divisions of the three which I have assumed as the components of the unity I seek to accomplish; there remains the Probable, which contains the Actual. To subject the whole poem to allegorical constructions would be erroneous, and opposed to the vital principle of a work of this kind which needs the support of direct and human interest. The inner and the outer meaning of Fable should flow together, each acting on the other, as the thought and the action in the life of a man. It is true that in order clearly to interpret the action, we should penetrate to the thought. But if we fail of that perception, the action, though less comprehended, still impresses its reality on our senses, and makes its appeal to our interest.

I have thus sought to maintain the Probable through that chain of incident in which human agencies are employed, and through those agencies the direct action

of the Poem is accomplished; while the Allegorical admits into the Marvellous the introduction of that subtler form of Truth, which if less positive than the Actual, is wider in its application, and ought to be more profound in its significance.

For the rest, it may perhaps be conceded that this poem is not without originality in the conception of its plot and the general treatment of its details. I am not aware of any previous romantic poem which it resembles in its main design, or in the character of its principal incidents;—and, though I may have incurred certain mannerisms of my own day, I yet venture to trust, that, in the pervading form or style, the mind employed has been sufficiently in earnest to leave its own peculiar effigy and stamp upon the work. For the incidents narrated, I may, indeed, thank the nature of my subject, if many of them could scarcely fail to be new. The celebrated poets of chivalrous fable — Ariosto, Tasso, and Spenser, have given to their scenery the colourings of the West. The Great North from which Chivalry sprung—its polar seas, its natural wonders, its wild legends, its antediluvian remains,—(wide fields for poetic description and heroic narrative)—have been, indeed, not wholly unexplored by poetry, but so little appropriated, that even after Tegner and Oehlenschläger, I dare to hope that I have found tracks in which no poet has preceded me, and over which yet breathes the native air of our National Romance.

For the Manners preserved through this poem, I naturally reject those which the rigid Antiquary would appropriate to the date of that Historical Arthur, of

whom we know so little, and take those of the age in which the Arthur of Romance, whom we know so well, revived into fairer life at the breath of Minstrel and Fabliast. The anachronism of chivalrous manners and costume for the British chief and his Knighthood, is absolutely required by all our familiar associations. On the other hand, without affecting any precise accuracy in details, I have kept the country of the brave Prince of the Silures (or South Wales) somewhat more definitely in view, than has been done by the French Romance writers; while in portraying his Saxon foes, I have endeavoured to distinguish their separate nationality, without enforcing too violent a contrast between the rudeness of the heathen Teutons and the polished Christianity of the Cymrian Knighthood.*

May I be permitted to say a word as to the metre I have selected?—One advantage it has,—that while

* In the more historical view of the position of Arthur, I have, however, represented it such as it really appears to have been,—not as the Sovereign of all Britain, and the conquering invader of Europe (according to the groundless fable of Geoffrey of Monmouth), but as the patriot Prince of South Wales, resisting successfully the invasion of his own native soil, and accomplishing the object of his career in preserving entire the nationality of his Welch countrymen. In thus contracting his sphere of action to the bounds of rational truth, his dignity, both moral and poetic, is obviously enhanced. Represented as the champion of all Britain against the Saxons, his life would have been but a notorious and signal failure; but as the preserver of the Cymrian Nationality—of that part of the British population which took refuge in Wales, he has a claim to the epic glory of success.

It is for this latter reason that I have gone somewhat out of the strict letter of history, in the poetical licence by which the Mercians are represented as Arthur's principal enemies, (though, properly speaking, the Mercian kingdom was not then founded:) The alliance between the Mercian and the Welch, which concludes the Poem—is at least not contrary to the spirit of History—since in very early periods such amicable bonds between Welch and Mercian were contracted, and the Welch on the whole, were on better terms with those formidable borderers, than with the other branches of the Saxon family.

thoroughly English, and not uncultivated by the best of the elder masters, it has never been applied to a poem of equal length, and has not been made too trite and familiar, by the lavish employment of recent writers*. Shakespeare has taught us its riches in The Venus and Adonis, — Spenser in The Astrophel, — Cowley has sounded its music amidst the various intonations of his irregular lyre. But of late years, if not wholly laid aside, it has been generally neglected for the more artificial and complicated Spenserian stanza, which may seem, at the first glance, to resemble it, but which to the ear is widely different in rhythm and construction.

The reader may perhaps remember that Dryden has spoken with emphatic praise of the "quatrain, or stanza of four in alternate rhyme." He says indeed, "that he had ever judged it more noble, and of greater dignity, both for the sound and number, than any other verse in use amongst us." That metre, in its simple integrity, is comprised in the stanza selected, ending in the vigour and terseness of the rhyming couplet, with which for the most part, the picture should be closed or the sense clenched. And whatever the imperfection of my own treatment of this variety in poetic form, I hazard a prediction that it will be ultimately revived into more frequent use, especially in narrative, and that its peculiar melodies of rhythm and cadence, as well as the just and measured facilities it affords to expression, neither too diffuse, nor too restricted, will be recognized hereafter in the hands of a more accomplished master of our language.

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* Southey has used it in the "Lay of the Laureate" and "The Poet's Pilgrimage,"—not his best known and most considerable poems.

Here ends all that I feel called upon to say respecting a Poem which I now acknowledge as the child of my most cherished hopes, and to which I deliberately confide the task to uphold, and the chance to continue, its father's name.

To this work, conceived first in the enthusiasm of youth, I have patiently devoted the best powers of my maturer years;—if it be worthless, it is at least the worthiest contribution that my abilities enable me to offer to the literature of my country: and I am unalterably convinced, that on this foundation I rest the least perishable monument of those thoughts and those labours which have made the life of my life.

E. BULWER LYTTON.

NOTE.

Of the notes inserted in the first edition I have retained only those which appeared to me absolutely necessary in explanation of the text. Among the notes omitted, was one appended to Book I., which defended at some length and by numerous examples, two alleged peculiarities of style or mannerism:—I content myself here with stating briefly,—

1st.—That in this work (as in my later ones generally) I have adopted what appears to me to have been the practice of Gray, (judging from the editions of his Poems revised by himself,) in the use of the capital initial. I prefix it—

First, to every substantive that implies a personification; thus War, Fame, &c., may in one line take the small initial as mere nouns, and in another line the capital initial, to denote that they are intended as personifications. This rule is clear—all personifications may be said to represent proper names; love

with a small l means but a passion or affection; with a large L, Love represents some mythological power that presides over the passion or affection, and is as much a proper name as Venus, Eros, Camdeo, &c.

Secondly, I prefix the capital in those rare instances in which an adjective is used as a noun; as the Unknown, the Obscure,* &c. The capital here but answers the use of all printed inventions, in simplifying to the Reader the author's meaning. If it be printed "he passed thro' the obscure," the Reader naturally looks for the noun that is to follow the adjective; if the capital initial be used, as "He passed thro' the Obscure," the eye conveys to the mind without an effort the author's intention to use the adjective as a substantive.

Thirdly, I prefix the capital initial where it serves to give an individual application to words that might otherwise convey only a general meaning; for instance,

> "Or his who loves the madding Nymphs to lead
> O'er the Fork'd Hill."

that is, the Forked Hill, *par emphasis*,—Parnassus.

The use of the capital in these instances seems to me warranted by common sense, and the best authorities in the minor niceties of our language.

With regard to the other point, referred to in the omitted note, I would observe, that I have deliberately used the freest licence in the rapid change of tense from past to present, or *vice versâ;* as a privilege essential to all ease, spirit, force, and variety, in narrative poetry; and warranted by the uniform practice of Pope, Dryden, and Milton. I subjoin a few examples:—

> "So *prayed* they, innocent, and to their thoughts
> Firm peace recovered soon and wonted calm;
> On to their morning's rural work they *haste*,
> Among sweet dews and flowers, where any row
> Of fruit trees over woody reach'd too far
> Their pampered boughs, and needed hands to check
> Fruitless embraces; or they *led* the vine
> To wed the elm."
>
> MILTON'S *Paradise Lost*, book v. from l. 209 to 216.

Here the tense changes three times.

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* So Pope, "Spenser himself affects the Obsolete."

Again—

"Straight *knew* him all the bands
Of angels under watch, and to his state
And to his message high in honour *rise*,
For on some message high they *guessed* him bound."
Ibid. book v. from l. 288 to 291.

"Thus while he spoke, the virgin from the ground
Upstarted fresh; already closed the wound,
And unconcerned for all she felt before,
Precipitates her flight along the shore;
The hell-hounds as ungorged with flesh and blood
Pursue their prey and seek their wonted food;
The fiend remounts his courser, mends his pace,
And all the vision *vanish'd* from the place."
DRYDEN'S *Theod. and Honor.*

Pope—not without reason esteemed for verbal correctness and precision—far exceeds all in his lavish use of this privilege, as one or two quotations will amply suffice to show.

"She said, and to the steeds approaching near
Drew from his seat the martial charioteer;
The vigorous Power* the trembling car *ascends*
Fierce for revenge, and Diomed *attends*
The groaning axle *bent* beneath the load," &c.
POPE'S *Iliad*, book v.

"Pierced through the shoulder first Decopis *fell*,
Next Eunomus and Thoon *sunk* to Hell.
Chersidamas, beneath the navel thrust,
Falls prone to earth, and *grasps* the bloody dust;
Cherops, the son of Hipposus, *was* near;
Ulysses reached him with the fatal spear,
But to his aid his brother Socus *flies*,
Socus, the brave, the generous, and the wise,
Near as he *drew* the warrior thus *began*," &c.
Ibid.

"Behind, unnumbered multitudes *attend*
To flank the navy and the shores defend.
Full on the front the pressing Trojans bear,
And Hector first *came* towering to the war,
Phœbus himself the rushing battle *led*,
A veil of clouds involves his radiant head—

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* In the corrupt and thoughtless mode of printing now in vogue, Power is of course printed with a small p, and the sense of the clearest of all English poets instantly becomes obscure.

"The vigorous power the trembling car ascends."

It is not till one has read the line twice over that one perceives "the power" means "the God," which, when printed "the Power," is obvious at a glance.

> The Greeks *expect* the shock; the clamours rise
> From different parts and *mingle* in the skies;
> Dire *was* the hiss of darts by heaven flung,
> And arrows, leaping from the bowstring, *sung*:
> These *drink* the life of generous warrior slain—
> Those guiltless *fall* and *thirst* for blood in vain."
>
> POPE'S *Odyssy*.

In the last quotation, brief as it is, the tense changes six times.

I ask indulgence of the Reader if I take this occasion to add a very short comment upon three objections to this poem which have been brought under my notice:—

1, that it contains too much learning; 2, that it abounds too much with classical allusions; 3, that it indulges in rare words or archaisms.

I wish I could plead guilty to the honorable charge that it contains too much learning. A distinguished critic has justly observed, that the greatest obstacle which the modern writer attempting an Epic would have to encounter, would be, in his utter impossibility to attain the requisite learning. For an Epic ought to embody the whole learning of the period in which it is composed; and in the present age that is beyond the aspiration of the most erudite scholar or the profoundest philosopher. Still, any attempt at a Heroic Poem must at least comprise all the knowledge which the nature of the subject will admit, and we cannot but observe that the greatest narrative poems are those in which the greatest amount of learning is contained. Beyond all comparison the most learned poems that exist, in reference to the age in which they were composed, are the Iliad and Odyssy; next to them, the Paradise Lost; next to that, the Æneid, in which the chief charm of the six latter books is in that 'exquisite erudition,' which Müller so discriminately admires in Virgil; and after these, in point of learning, come perhaps the 'Divine Comedy' and the 'Fairy Queen.' So that I have only to regret my deficiency of learning, rather than to apologise for the excess of it.

With regard to the classical allusions which I have permitted myself, I might shelter my practice under the mantles of our great masters in heroic song—Milton and Spenser; but in fact such admixture of the Classic with the Gothic muse is so essentially the characteristic of the minstrelsy of the middle ages, that without a liberal use of the same combination, I could not have preserved the colouring proper to my subject. And, indeed,

I think the advice which one of the most elegant of modern critics has given to the painter, is equally applicable to the poet,

> "Non te igitur lateant antiqua numismata, gemmæ,
> Quodque refert specie veterum post sæcula mentem;
> Splendidior quippe ex illis assurgit imago
> Magnaque se rerum facies aperit meditanti.*"

Lastly, the moderate use of archaisms has always been deemed admissible in a narrative poem of some length, and rather perhaps an ornament than a defect, where the action of the poem is laid in remote antiquity. And I may add that not only the revival of old, but the invention of new words, if sparingly resorted to, is among the least contestable of poetic licences—a license freely recognized by Horace, elaborately maintained by Dryden, and tacitly sanctioned, age after age, by the practice of every poet by whom our language has been enriched. I have certainly not abused either of these privileges, for while I have only adopted three new words of foreign derivation, I do not think there are a dozen words in the whole poem which can be considered archaisms: and in the three or four instances in which such words are not to be found in Milton, Shakespere, or Spenser, they are taken from the Saxon element of our language, and are still popularly used in the more northern parts of the island, in which that Saxon element is more tenaciously preserved.

If these matters do not seem to the reader of much importance, in reference to a poem of this design and extent, I will own to him confidentially, that I incline to his opinion. But I have met with no objections to the general composition of this work, more serious than those to which the above remarks are intended to reply. Some objections to special lines or stanzas which appeared to me prompted by a juster criticism, or which occurred to myself in reperusal, I have carefully endeavoured in this edition to remove.

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* Du Fresnoy *de Arte Graphicâ.*

KING ARTHUR.

BOOK I.

ARGUMENT.

Opening — King Arthur keeps holiday in the Vale of Carduel — Pastimes — Arthur's sentiments on life, love, and mortal change—The strange apparition —The King follows the phantom into the forest—His return—The discomfiture of his knights—The Court disperses—Night—The restless King ascends his battlements—His soliloquy—He is attracted by the light from the Wizard's tower—Merlin described—The King's narrative—The Enchanter's invocation —Morning—The tilt-yard—Sports, knightly and national—Merlin's address to Arthur—The Three Labours enjoined—Arthur departs from Carduel—His absence explained by Merlin to the Council—Description of Arthur's three friends, Caradoc, Gawaine, and Lancelot—The especial love between Arthur and the last—Lancelot encounters Arthur—The parting of the friends.

BOOK I.

I.

Our land's first legends, love and knightly deeds,
And wonderous Merlin, and his wandering King,
The triple labour, and the glorious meeds
Sought in the world of Fable-land, I sing:
Go forth, O Song, amidst the banks of old,
And glide translucent o'er the sands of gold.

II.

Now is the time when, after sparkling showers,
Her starry wreaths the virgin jasmine weaves;
Now murmurous bees return with sunny hours:
And light wings rustle thro' the glinting leaves;
Music in every bough; on mead and lawn
May lifts her fragrant altars to the dawn.

III.

Now life, with every moment, seems to start
In air, in wave, on earth;—above, below;
And o'er her new-born children, Nature's heart
Heaves with the gladness mothers only know.
On poet times the month of poets shone—
May deck'd the world, and Arthur fill'd the throne.

IV.

Hard by a stream, amidst a pleasant vale
King Arthur held his careless holiday:—
The stream was blithe with many a silken sail,
The vale with many a proud pavilion gay;
While Cymri's dragon, from the Roman's hold,(1)
Spread with calm wing o'er Carduel's domes of gold.

V.

Dark, to the right, thick forests mantled o'er
A gradual mountain sloping to the plain;
Whose gloom but lent to light a charm the more,
As pleasure pleases most when neighbouring pain;
And all our human joys most sweet and holy,
Sport in the shadows cast from melancholy.

VI.

Below that mount, along the glossy sward
Were gentle groups, discoursing gentle things;—
Or listening idly where the skilful bard
Woke the sweet tempest of melodious strings;
Or whispering love—I ween, less idle they,
For love 's the honey in the flowers of May.

VII.

Some plied in lusty race the glist'ning oar;
Some, noiseless, snared the silver-scalëd prey;
Some wreathed the dance along the level shore;
And each was happy in his chosen way.
Not by one shaft is Care, the hydra, kill'd,
So Mirth, determined, had his quiver fill'd.

VIII.

Bright mid his blooming Court, like royal Morn
Girt with the Hours that lead the jocund Spring,
When to its smile delight and flowers are born,
And clouds are rose-hued,—shone the Cymrian King.
Above that group, o'er-arch'd from tree to tree,
Thick garlands hung their odorous canopy;

IX.

And in the midst of that delicious shade
Up sprang a sparkling fountain, silver-voiced,
And the bee murmur'd, and the breezes played:
In their gay youth, the youth of May rejoiced—
And they in hers—as thro' that leafy hall
Chimed the heart's laughter with the fountain's fall.

X.

Propp'd on his easy arm, the King reclin'd,
And glancing gaily round the ring, quoth he—
"'Man,' say our sages, 'hath a fickle mind,
And pleasures pall, if long enjoy'd they be.'
But I, methinks, like this soft summer-day,
Mid blooms and sweets could wear the hours away.

XI.

"Feel, in the eyes of Love, a cloudless sun,
Taste, in the breath of Love, eternal spring;
Could age but keep the joys that youth has won,
The human heart would fold its idle wing!
If change there be in Fate and Nature's plan,
Wherefore blame us?—it is in Time, not Man."

XII.

He spoke, and from the happy conclave there
Echoed the murmur "Time is but to blame:"
Each knight glanced amorous on his chosen fair,
And to the glance blush'd each assenting dame:
But thought had dimm'd the smile in Arthur's eye,
And the light speech was rounded by a sigh.

XIII.

And while they murmur'd "Time is but to blame,"
Right in the centre of the silken ring,
Sudden stood forth (none marking whence it came),
The gloomy shade of some phantasmal thing;
It stood, dim-outlined in a sable shroud,
And shapeless, as in noon-day hangs a cloud.

XIV.

Hush'd was each lip, and every cheek was pale;
The stoutest heart beat tremulous and high:
"Arise," it muttered from the spectral veil,
"I call thee, King!" Then burst the wrathful cry,
Feet found the earth, and ready hands the sword,
And angry knighthood bristled round its lord.

XV.

But Arthur rose, and, waiving back the throng,
Fronted the Image with a dauntless brow:
Then shrunk the Phantom, indistinct, along
The unbending herbage, noiseless, dark, and slow;
And, where the forest night at noonday made,
Glided,—as from the dial glides the shade.

XVI.

Gone;—but an ice-bound horror seem'd to cling
To air; the revellers stood transfix'd to stone;
While from amidst them, palely passed the King,
Dragg'd by a will more royal than his own:
Onwards he went; the invisible controul
Compell'd him, as a dream compels the soul.

XVII.

They saw, and sought to stay him, but in vain;
They saw, and sought to speak, but voice was dumb:
So Death some warrior from his armëd train
Plucks forth defenceless when his hour is come.
He gains the wood; their sight the shadows bar,
And darkness wraps him as the cloud a star.

XVIII.

Abruptly, as it came, the charm was past
That bound the circle: as from heavy sleep
Starts the hush'd war-camp at the trumpet's blast,
Fierce into life the voiceless revellers leap;
Swift to the wood the glittering tumult springs,
And thro' the vale the shrill BON-LEF-HER rings.*

XIX.

From stream, from tent, from pastime near and far,
All press confus'dly to the signal cry—
So from the ROCK OF BIRDS† the shout of war
Sends countless wings in clamour thro' the sky—
The cause a word, the track a sign affords,
And all the forest gleams with starry swords.

* The shout of war.

† The Rock of Birds—CRAIG Y DERYN—so called from the number of birds chiefly those of prey) that breed on it.

XX.

As on some stag the hunters single, gaze,
Gathering together, and from far, the herd,
So round the margin of the woodland-maze
Pale beauty circles, trembling if a bird
Flutter a bough, or if, without a sound,
Some leaf fall breezeless, eddying to the ground.

XXI.

An hour or more had towards the western seas
Speeded the golden chariot of the day,
When a white plume came glancing through the trees,
The serried branches groaningly gave way,
And, with a bound, delivered from the wood,
Safe, in the sun-light, royal Arthur stood.

XXII.

Who shall express the joy that aspect woke!
Some laugh'd aloud, and clapp'd their snowy hands;
Some ran, some knelt, some turn'd aside and broke
Into glad tears:—But all unheeding stands
The King; and shivers in the glowing light;
And his breast heaves as panting from a fight.

XXIII.

Yet still in those pale features, seen more near,
Speak the stern will, the soul to valour true;
It shames man not to feel man's human fear,
It shames man only if the fear subdue;
And masking trouble with a noble guile,
Soon the proud heart restores the kingly smile.

XXIV.

But no account could anxious love obtain,
Nor curious wonder, of the portents seen;
" Bootless his search," he lightly said, " and vain
As haply had the uncourteous summons been.
Some mocking sport, perchance, of merry May."
He ceased; and shuddering, turn'd his looks away.

XXV.

Now, back, alas, less comely than they went,
Drop, one by one, the seekers from the chase,
With mangled plumes and mantles dreadly rent;—
Sore bleed the Loves in Elphin's blooming face;
Madoc, whose dancing scarcely brush'd the dew,
O grief! limps, crippled by a stump of yew!

XXVI.

In short, such pranks had briar and bramble played,
And stock and stone, with vest, and face, and limb,
That had some wretch denied the place was made
For sprites, a sprite had soon been made of him!
And sure, nought less than some demoniac power
Had looks so sweet bewitched to lines so sour.

XXVII.

But shame and anger vanish'd when they saw
Him whose warm smile a life had well repaid,
For noble hearts a noble chief can draw
Into that circle where all self doth fade;
Lost in the sea a hundred waters roll,
And subject natures merge in one great soul.

XXVIII.

Now once again quick question, brief reply,
"What saw, what heard the King?" "Nay, gentles, what
Saw or heard ye?"—"The forest and the sky,
The rustling branches,"—"And the phantom not?
No more," quoth Arthur, "of a thriftless chase,
For cheer so stinted brief may be the grace.

XXIX.

"But see, the sun descendeth down the west,
And graver cares to Carduel now recall:
Gawaine, my steed;—Sweet ladies, gentle rest,
And dreams of happy morrows to ye all."
Now stirs the movement on the busy plain;
To horse—to boat; and homeward wind the train.

XXX.

O'er hill, down stream, the pageant fades away,
More and more faint the plash of dipping oar;
Voices, and music, and the steed's shrill neigh,
From the grey twilight dying more and more;
Till over stream and valley, wide and far,
Reign the sad silence and the solemn star.

XXXI.

Save where, like some true poet's lonely soul,
Careless who hears, sings on the unheeded fountain;
Save where the thin clouds wanly, slowly roll
O'er the mute darkness of the forest mountain—
Where, haply, busied with unholy rite,
Still glides that phantom, and dismays the night.

XXXII.

Sleep, the sole angel left of all below,
O'er the lull'd city sheds the ambrosial wreaths,
Wet with the dews of Eden; Bliss and Woe
Are equals, and the lowest slave that breathes
Under the shelter of those healing wings,
Reigns, half his life, in realms too fair for Kings.

XXXIII.

Too fair those realms for Arthur; long he lay
An exiled suppliant at the gate of dreams,
And vexed, and wild, and fitful as a ray
Quivering upon the surge of stormy streams;
Thought broke in glimmering trouble o'er his breast,
And found no billow where its beam could rest.*

XXXIV.

He rose, and round him drew his ermined gown,
Passed from his chamber, wound the turret stair,
And from his castle's steep embattled crown
Bared his hot forehead to the fresh'ning air.
How Silence, like a god's tranquillity,
Fill'd with delighted peace the conscious sky!

XXXV.

Broad, luminous, serene, the sovereign moon
Shone o'er the roofs below, the lands afar—
The vale so joyous with the mirth at noon;
The pastures virgin of the lust of war;
And the still river shining as it flows,
Calm as a soul on which the heavens repose.

* "Qual d'acqua chiara il tremolante lume," etc.—ARIOSTO, *canto viii. stan.* 71

XXXVI.

"And must these pass from me and mine away?"
Murmured the monarch; "Must the mountain home
Of those whose fathers, in a ruder day,
With naked bosoms rush'd on shrinking Rome,
Yield this last refuge from the ruthless wave,
And what was Britain be the Saxon's slave?

XXXVII.

"Why hymn our harps high music in our hall?
Doom'd is the tree whose fruit was noble deeds—
Where the axe spared the thunder-bolt must fall,
And the wind scatter as it list the seeds!
Fate breathes, and kingdoms wither at the breath;
But kings are deathless, kingly if the death!"

XXXVIII.

He ceased, and look'd, with a defying eye,
Where the dark forest clothed the mount with awe;
Gazed, and then proudly turn'd:—when lo, hard by
From a lone turret in his keep, he saw,
Through the horn casement, a clear steadfast light,
Lending meek tribute to the orbs of night.

XXXIX.

And far, and far, I ween, that little ray
Sent its pure streamlet through the world of air.
The wanderer oft, benighted on his way,
Saw it, and paused in superstitious prayer,
For well he knew the beacon and the tower,
And the great Master of the spells of power.

XL.

There He, who yet in Fable's deathless page
Reigns, compass'd with the ring of pleasing dread,
Which the true wizard, whether bard or sage,
Draws round him living, and commands when dead—
The solemn Merlin—from the midnight won
The hosts that bowed to starry Solomon.

XLI.

Not fear that light on Arthur's breast bestowed,
As with a father's smile it met his gaze;
It cheered, it soothed, it warmed him while it glowed;
Brought back the memory of young hopeful days,
When the child stood by the great prophet's knee,
And drank high thoughts to strengthen years to be.

XLII.

As with a tender chiding, the calm light
Seemed to reproach him for secreted care,
Seem'd to ask back the old familiar right
Of lore to counsel, or of love to share;
The prompt heart answers to the voiceless call,
And the step quickens o'er the winding wall.

XLIII.

Before that tower precipitously sink
The walls, down-shelving to the castle base;
A slender draw-bridge, swung from brink to brink,
Alone gives fearful access to the place;
Now from that tower, the chains the drawbridge raise,
And leave the gulf all pathless to the gaze.

XLIV.

But close where Arthur stands, a warder's horn,
Fix'd to the stone, to those who dare to win
The enchanter's cell, supplies the note to warn
The mighty weaver of dread webs within.
Loud sounds the horn, the chain descending clangs,
And o'er the abyss the dizzy pathway hangs;

XLV.

Mutely the door slides sullen in the stone,
And closes back, the gloomy threshold cross'd;
There sate the wizard on a Druid throne,
Where sate Duw-Iou,* ere his reign was lost;
His wand uplifted in his solemn hand,
And the weird volume on its brazen stand.

XLVI.

O'er the broad breast the heavy brows of thought
Hung, as if bow'd beneath the load sublime
Of spoils from Nature's fading boundaries brought,
Or the dusk treasure-house of orient Time;
And the unutterable calmness shows
The toil's great victory by the soul's repose.

XLVII.

Ev'n as the Tyrian views his argosies,
Moor'd in the port (the gold of Ophir won),
And heeds no more the billow and the breeze,
And the clouds wandering o'er the wintry sun,
So calmly Wisdom eyes (its voyage o'er)
The traversed ocean from the beetling shore.

* Duw-Iou (the Taranus of Lucan) the most solemn and august, though not the most popular of the Druidical divinities, answering to the classic Jupiter.

XLVIII.

A hundred years press'd o'er that awful head,
As o'er an Alp, their diadem of snow;
And, as an Alp, a hundred years had fled,
And left as firm the giant form below;
So in the hush of some Chaonian grove,
Sate the grey father of Pelasgic Jove.

XLIX.

Before that power, sublimer than his own,
With downcast looks, the king inclined the knee;
The enchanter smiled, and, bending from his throne,
Drew to his breast his pupil tenderly;
And press'd his lips on that young forehead fair,
And with large hand smooth'd back the golden hair;

L.

And, looking in those frank and azure eyes,
"What," said the prophet, "doth my Arthur seek
From the grey wisdom which the young despise?
The young, perchance, are right!—Fair infant, speak!"
Thrice sigh'd the monarch, and at length began:
"Can wisdom ward the storms of fate from man?

LI.

"What spell can thrust Affliction from the gate?
What tree is sacred from the lightning flame?"
"Son," said the seer, "the laurel!—even Fate,
Which blasts Ambition, but illumines Fame.
Say on."—The king smiled sternly, and obey'd—
Track we the steps which track'd the warning shade.

LII.

" On to the wood, and to its inmost dell
Will-less I went," the monarch thus pursued,
" Before me still, but darkly visible,
The phantom glided through the solitude;
At length it paused,—a sunless pool was near,
As ebon black, and yet as chrystal clear.

LIII.

" ' Look, King, below,' whispered the shadowy One:
What seem'd a hand sign'd beckoning to the wave,
I look'd below, and never realms undone
Show'd war more awful than the mirror gave;
There rush'd the steed, there glanced on spear the spear,
And spectre-squadrons closed in fell career.

LIV.

" I saw—I saw my dragon standard there,—
Throng'd, there, the Briton, there, the Saxon wheel'd;
I saw it vanish from that nether air—
I saw it trampled on that phantom field;—
On pour'd the Saxon hosts—we fled—we fled!
And the Pale Horse * rose ghastly o'er the dead.

LV.

" Lo, the wan shadow of a giant hand
Pass'd o'er the pool—the demon war was gone;
City on city stretch'd, and land on land;
The wonderous landscape broadening, lengthening on,
Till that small compass in its clasp contain'd
All this wide isle o'er which my fathers reign'd.

* The White Horse, the standard of the Saxons.

LVI.

" There, by the lord of streams, a palace rose;
On bloody floors there was a throne of state;
And in the land there dwelt one race—our foes;
And on the single throne the Saxon sate!
And Cymri's crown was on his knitted brow;
And where stands Cardiel, went the labourer's plough.

LVII.

" And east and west, and north and south I turn'd,
And call'd my people as a king should call;
Pale in the hollow mountains I discern'd
Rude scattered stragglers from the common thrall;
Kingless and armyless, by crag and cave,—
Ghosts on the margin of their country's grave.

LVIII.

" And even there, amidst the barren steeps,
I heard the tramp, I saw the Saxon steel;
Aloft, red murder like a deluge sweeps,
Nor rock can save, nor cavern can conceal;
Hill after hill, the waves devouring rise,
Till in one mist of carnage closed my eyes!

LIX.

" Then spoke the hell-born shadow by my side—
' O king, who dreamest, amid sweets and bloom,
Life, like one summer holiday, can glide,
Blind to the storm-cloud of the coming doom;
ARTHUR PENDRAGON, to the Saxon's sway
Thy kingdom and thy crown shall pass away.'

LX.

" ' And who art thou, that Heaven's august decrees
Usurpest thus?' I cried, and lo the space
Was void!—Amidst the horror of the trees,
And by the pool, which mirror'd back the face
Of Dark in chrystal darkness—there I stood,
And the sole spectre was the Solitude!

LXI.

" I knew no more—strong as a mighty dream
The trouble seized the soul, and seal'd the sense;
I knew no more, till in the blessed beam,
Life sprung to loving Nature for defence;
Vale, flower, and fountain laugh'd in jocund spring,
And pride came back,—again I was a king!

LXII.

" But, ev'n the while with airy sport of tongue
(As with light wing the skylark from its nest
Lures the invading step) I led the throng
From the dark brood of terror in my breast;
Still frown'd the vision on my haunted eye,
And blood seem'd reddening in the azure sky.

LXIII.

" O thou, the Almighty Lord of earth and heaven,
Without whose will not ev'n a sparrow falls,
If to my sight the fearful truth was given,
If thy dread hand hath graven on these walls
The Assyrian's doom, and to the stranger's sway
My kingdom and my crown shall pass away,—

LXIV.

" Grant this—a freeman's, if a monarch's, prayer!—
LIFE, while my life one man from chains can save;
While earth one refuge, or the cave one lair,
Yields to the closing struggle of the brave!—
Mine the last desperate but avenging hand,
If reft the sceptre, not resign'd the brand!"

LXV.

" Close to my clasp!" the prophet cried, " Impart
To these iced veins the glow of youth once more;
The healthful throb of one great human heart
Baffles more fiends than all a magian's lore.
Brave child!——" Young arms embracing check'd the rest,
And youth and age stood mingled breast to breast.

LXVI.

" Ho!" cried the mighty master, while he broke
From the embrace, and round from vault to floor
Mysterious echoes answered as he spoke;
And flames twined snakelike round the wand he bore,
And freezing winds tumultuous swept the cell,
As from the wings of hosts invisible:

LXVII.

" Ho! ye spiritual Ministers of all
The airy space below the Sapphire Throne,
To the swift axle of this earthly ball—
Yea, to the deep, where evermore alone
Hell's king with memory of lost glory dwells,
And from that memory weaves his hell of hells;—

LXVIII.

" Ho! ye who fill the crevices of air,
And speed the whirlwind round the reeling bark—
Or dart destroying in the forkëd glare,
Or rise—the bloodless People of the Dark,
In the pale shape of Dreams—when to the bed
Of Murder glide the simulated dead,—

LXIX.

" Hither ye myriad hosts!—O'er tower and dome,
Wait the high mission, and attend the word;
Whether to pierce the mountain with the gnome,
Or soar to heights where never wing'd the bird;
So that the secret and the boon ye wrest
From Time's cold grasp, or Fate's reluctant breast!"

LXX.

Mute stood the king—when lo, the dragon-keep
Shook to its rack'd foundations, as when all
Corycia's caverns and the Delphic steep
Shook to the foot-tread of invading Gaul;*
Or, as his path when flaming Ætna frees,
Shakes some proud city on Sicilian seas:

LXXI.

Reel'd heaving from his feet the dizzy floor;
Swam dreamlike on his gaze the fading cell;
As falls the seaman, when the waves dash o'er
The plank that glideth from his grasp—he fell.
To eyes ungifted, deadly were the least
Of those last mysteries, Nature yields her priest.

* Pausan. *Phoc.* c. 28.

LXXII.

Morn, the joy-bringer, from her sparkling urn
Scatters o'er herb and flower the orient dew;
The larks to heaven, and souls to thought return—
Life, in each source, leaps rushing forth anew,
Fills every grain in nature's boundless plan,
And wakes new fates in each desire of man.

LXXIII.

In each desire, each thought, each fear, each hope,
Each scheme, each wish, each fancy, and each end,
That morn calls forth, say, who can span the scope?
Who track the arrow which the soul may send?
One morning woke Olympia's youthful son,
And long'd for fame—and half the world was won.

LXXIV.

Fair shines the sun on stately Carduel;
The falcon, hoodwink'd, basks upon the wall;
The tilt-yard echoes with the clarion's swell,
And lusty youth comes thronging to the call;
And martial sports (the daily wont) begin,
The page must practice if the knight would win.

LXXV.

Some spur the palfrey at the distant ring;
Some, with blunt lance, in mimic tourney charge;
Here skirs the pebble from the poisëd sling,
Or flies the arrow rounding to the targe;
While Age and Fame sigh smiling to behold
The young leaves budding to replace the old.

LXXVI.

Nor yet forgot amid the special sports
Of polish'd Chivalry, the primal ten*
Athletic contests, known in elder courts
Ere knighthood rose from the great Father-men.
Beyond the tilt-yard spread the larger space,
For the strong wrestle and the breathless race;

LXXVII.

Here some, the huge dull weights up-heaving throw;
Some ply the staff, and some the sword and shield;
And some that falchion with its thunder-blow
Which HEUS,(2) the Guardian, taught the Celt to wield;
Heus, who first guided o'er "the Hazy Sea"
Our Titan† sires from far Defrobani.

LXXVIII.

Life thus astir, and sport upon the wing,
Why yet doth Arthur dream day's prime away?
Still in charm'd slumber lies the quiet King;
On his own couch the merry sunbeams play;
Gleam o'er the arms hung trophied from the wall;
And Cymri's antique crown surmounting all.

LXXIX.

Slowly he woke; life came back with a sigh,
(That herald, or that follower, to the gate
Of all our knowledge;)—and his startled eye
Fell where beside his couch the prophet sate;
And with that sight rushed back the mystic cell,
The awful summons, the arrested spell.

* The ten manly games (Gwrolgampau).

† "Our Titan sires,"—according to certain mythologists, the Celts, or Cimmerians, were the Titans.

LXXX.

"Prince," said the prophet, "with this morn awake
From pomp, from pleasure, to high toils and brave;
From yonder wall the arms of knighthood take,
But leave the crown the knightly arms may save;
O'er mount and vale, go, pilgrim, forth alone,
And win the gifts which shall defend a throne.

LXXXI.

"Thus speak the Fates—till in the heavens the sun
Rounds his revolving course, O King, return
To man's first, noblest birthright, TOIL:—so won
In Grecian fable, to the ambrosial urn
Of joyous Hebe, and the Olympian grove,
The labouring son Alcmena bore to Jove.

LXXXII.

"By the stout heart to peril's sight enured,
By the wise brain which toil hath stored and skill'd,
Valour is school'd and glory is secured,
And the large ends of fame and fate fulfill'd:
But hear the gifts thy year of proof must gain,
To fail in one leaves those achieved in vain.

LXXXIII.

"The Falchion, welded from a diamond gem,
Hid in the Lake of Argent Music-Falls,
Where springs a forest from a single stem,
And moon-lit waters close o'er Cuthite halls—
First taste the herb that grows upon a grave,
Then see the bark that wafts thee down the wave.

LXXXIV.

"The silver Shield in which the infant sleep
Of Thor was cradled,—now the jealous care
Of the fierce Dwarf whose home is on the deep,
Where drifting icerocks clash in lifeless air;
And War's pale Sisters smile to see the shock
Stir the still curtains round the couch of Lok.

LXXXV.

"And last of all—before the Iron Gate
Which opes its entrance at the faintest breath,
But hath no egress; where remorseless Fate
Sits, weaving life, within the porch of Death;
Earth's childlike guide shall wait thee in the gloom,
With golden locks, and looks that light the tomb.

LXXXVI.

"Achieve the sword, the shield, the virgin guide,
And in those gifts appease the Powers of wrath;
Be danger braved, and be delight defied,
From grief take wisdom, and from wisdom faith;—
And tho' dark wings hang o'er these threatened halls,
Tho' war's red surge break thundering round thy walls,

LXXXVII.

"Tho', in the rear of time, these prophet eyes
See to thy sons, thy Cymrians, many a woe;
Yet from thy loins a race of kings shall rise,
Whose throne shall shadow all the seas that flow;
Whose empire, broader than the Cæsar won,
Shall clasp a realm where never sets the sun.

LXXXVIII.

"And thou, thyself, shalt live from age to age,
A thought of beauty and a type of fame;—
Not the faint memory of some mouldering page,
But by the hearths of men a household name!
Theme to all song, and marvel to all youth—
Beloved as Fable, yet believed as Truth.

LXXXIX.

"But if thou fail—thrice woe!" Up sprang the King:
"Let the woe fall on feeble kings who fail
Their country's need! When eagles spread the wing
They face the sun, not tremble at the gale:
And, if ordain'd heaven's mission to perform,
They bear the thunder where they cleave the storm."

XC.

Ere yet the shadows from the castle's base
Show'd lapsing noon—in Carduel's council hall,
To the high princes of the Dragon race,
The mighty Prophet, whom the awe of all
As Fate's unerring oracle ador'd,—
Told the self exile of the parted lord.

XCI.

For his throne's safety and his country's weal
On high emprize to distant regions bound;
The cause must wisdom for success conceal;
For each sage counsel is, as fate, profound:
And none may trace the travail in the seed
Till the blade burst to glory in the deed.

XCII.

Few were the orders, as wise orders are,
For the upholding of the chiefless throne;
To strengthen peace and yet prepare for war;
Lest the fierce Saxon (Arthur's absence known),
Loose Death's pale charger from the broken rein,
To its grim pastures on the bloody plain.

XCIII.

Leave we the startled Princes in the hall;
Leave we the wondering babblers in the mart;
The grief, the guess, the hope, the doubt, and all
That stir a nation to its inmost heart,
When some portentous Chance, unseen till then,
Strides in the circles of unthinking men.*

XCIV.

Where the screen'd portal from the embattled town,
Opes midway on the hill, the lonely King,
Forth issuing, guides his barded charger down
The steep descent. Amidst the pomp of spring
Lapses the lucid river; jocund May
Waits in the vale to strew with flowers his way.

XCV.

Of brightest steel, (but not emboss'd with gold
As when in tournies rode the royal knight,)
His arms flash sunshine back; the azure fold
Of the broad mantle, like a wave of light,
Floats tremulous, and leaves the sword-arm free.
Fair was that darling of all Poetry!

* Schiller.

XCVI.

Thro' the raised vizor beamed the fearless eye,
The limpid mirror of a stately soul;
Bright with young hope, but grave with purpose high;
Sweet to encourage, steadfast to control;
An eye from which subjected hosts might draw,
As from a double fountain, love and awe.

XCVII.

The careless curl, that from the helm escaped,
Gleamed in the sunlight, lending gold to gold.
Nor fairer face, from Parian marble shaped,
Beam'd gracious down from Delian shrines of old;
Albeit in bolder majesty looked forth
The hardy soul of the chivalric North.

XCVIII.

O'er the light limb, and o'er the shoulders broad,
The steel flowed pliant as a silken vest;
Strength was so supple that like grace it showed,
And force was only by its ease confest;
Ev'n as the storms in gentlest waters sleep,
And in the ripple flows the mighty deep.

XCIX.

Now wound his path beside the woods that hang
O'er the green pleasaunce of the sunlit plain,
When a young footstep from the forest sprang,
And a light hand was on the charger's rein;
Surprised, the adventurer halts,—but pleased surveys
The friendly face that smiles upon his gaze.

C.

Of all the flowers of knighthood in his train
Three he loved best; young Caradoc the mild,
Whose soul was filled with song; and frank Gawaine,(3)
Whom mirth for ever, like a fairy child,
Lock'd from the cares of life; but neither grew
Close to his heart, like Lancelot the true.

CI.

Gawaine when gay, and Caradoc when grave,
Pleased: but young Lancelot, or grave or gay.
As yet life's sea had roll'd not with a wave
To rend the plank from those twin hearts away;
At childhood's gate instinctive love began
And warm'd with every sun that led to man.

CII.

The same sports lured them, the same labours strung,
The same song thrill'd them with the same delight;
Where in the aisle their maiden arms had hung,
The same moon lit them thro' the watchful night;
The same day bound their knighthood to maintain
Life from reproach, and honour from a stain.

CIII.

And if the friendship scarce in each the same,
The soul has rivals where the heart has not;
So Lancelot loved his Arthur more than fame,
And Arthur more than life his Lancelot.
Lost here Art's mean distinctions! knightly troth,
Frank youth, high thoughts, crown'd Nature's kings in both.*

* Lancelot was, indeed, the son of a king, but a dethroned and a tributary one. The popular history of his infancy will be told in a subsequent book.

CIV.

"Whither wends Arthur?" "Whence comes Lancelot?"
"From yonder forest, sought at dawn of day."
"Why from the forest?" "Prince and brother, what,
When the bird, startled, flutters from the spray,
Makes the leaves quiver? What disturbs the rill
If but a zephyr floateth from the hill?

CV.

"And ask'st thou why thy brother's heart is stirr'd
By every tremor that can vex thine own?
What in that forest had'st thou seen or heard?
What was that shadow o'er thy sunshine thrown?
Thy lips were silent,—be the secret thine;
But half the trouble it conceal'd was mine.

CVI.

"Did danger meet thee in that dismal lair?
'T was mine to face it as thy heart had done.
'Twas mine——" "O brother," cried the King, "beware,
The fiend has snares it shames not man to shun;—
Ah, woe to eyes on whose recoiling sight
Opes the dark world beyond the veil of light!

CVII.

"Listen to Fate;—till to his own loved May
Comes back BÂL-HUAN in his amber car,*
The hunter's lively horn, the hound's deep bay,
May fill with joy melodious PENLLAFAR,†
On spell-bound ears the Harper's tones may fall,
Love deck the bower and Pleasure trim the hall—

* BÂL-HUAN, the sun. Those heaps of stone found throughout Britain (Crugiau or Carneu), were sacred to the sun in the Druid worship, and served as beacons in his honour on May eve. May was his consecrated month. The rocking-stones which mark these sanctuaries were called amber-stones.

† CWM-PENLLAFAR, the Vale of Melody—so called (as Mr. Pennant suggests) from the music of the hounds when in full cry over the neighbouring Rock of the Hunter.

CVIII.

"But thou, O thou, my Lancelot shalt mourn
The void, a life withdrawn bequeaths the soul;
No mirth shall greet thee in the buxom horn—
Nor flash in liquid sunshine from the bowl;
Sorrow shall sit where I have dwelt,—and be
A second Arthur in its truth to thee.

CIX.

"Alone I go;—submit; since thus the Fates
And the great Prophet of our race ordain;
So shall we drive invasion from our gates,
Guard life from shame, and Cymri from the chain;
No more than this my soul to thine may tell—
Forgive,—Saints shield thee!—now thy hand—farewell!"

CX.

"Farewell! Can danger be more strong than death—
Loose the soul's link, the grave-surviving vow?
Wilt thou find fragrance ev'n in glory's wreath,
If valour weave it for thy single brow?
No—not farewell! What claim more strong than brother
Canst thou allow?"—"My Country is my Mother!"—

CXI.

At the rebuke of those mild, solemn words,
Friendship submissive bow'd—its voice was still'd;
As when some mighty bard with sudden chords
Strikes down the passion he before had thrill'd,
Making grief awe;—so rush'd that sentence o'er
The soul it mastered;—Lancelot pled no more,

CXII.

But loosing from the hand it clasp'd, his own,
He waved farewell, and turn'd his face away;
His sorrow only by his silence shown:—
Thus, when from earth glides summer's golden day,
Music forsakes the boughs, and winds the stream;
And life, in deep'ning quiet, mourns the beam.

NOTES TO BOOK I.

1 "*While Cymri's dragon from the Roman's hold*
Spread with calm wing o'er Carduel's domes of gold."

Page 4, stanza iv.

THE CARDUEL of the FABLIAUX is not easily ascertained: it is here identified with Caerleon on the Usk, the favourite residence of Arthur, according to the Welch poets. This must have been a city of no ordinary splendour in the supposed age of Arthur, while still fresh from the hands of the Roman; since, so late as the twelfth century, Giraldus Cambrensis, in his well-known description, speaks as an eye-witness of the many vestiges of its former splendour. "Immense palaces, ornamented with gilded roofs, in imitation of Roman magnificence, a tower of prodigious size, remarkable hot baths, relics of temples," &c. (Giraldus Cambrensis, Sir R. Hoare's translation, vol. i. p. 103.) Geoffrey of Monmouth (l. ix. c. 12,) also mentions, admiringly, the gilt roofs of Caerleon, a subject on which he might be a little more accurate than in those other details in his notable chronicle, not drawn from the same ocular experience. The luxurious Romans, indeed, had bequeathed to the chiefs of Britain abodes of splendour and habits of refinement which had no parallel in the Saxon domination. Sir F. Palgrave truly remarks, that even in the fourteenth century the edifices raised in Britain

by the Romans were so numerous and costly as almost to excel any others on this side of the Alps. Caerleon (Isca Augusta) was the Roman capital of Siluria, the garrison of the renowned Second or Augustan legion, and the Palatian residence of the Prætor. It was not, however, according to national authority, founded by the Romans, but by the mythical Belin Mawr, three centuries before Cæsar's invasion. It is scarcely necessary to observe, that the dragon was the standard of the Cymry, (a word, by the way, which I trust my Welch readers will forgive me for spelling Cymri).

[2] *"Which Heus the Guardian taught the Celt to wield."*
Page 22, stanza lxxvii.

HEUS is the same deity as ESUS, or HESUS, mentioned in Lucan, the Mars of the Celts. According to the Welch triads, HEUS (or HU—Hu Gadarn; i. e. the mighty Guardian, or Inspector) brought the people of Cymry first into this isle, from the summer country called Defrobani, (in the Tauric Chersonese) over the Hazy Sea (the German Ocean). Davies, in his Celtic Researches, observes that some commentator, at least as old as the twelfth century, repeatedly explains the situation of Defrobani as "that on which Constantinople now stands." "This comment," adds Davies, "would not have been made without some authority; it belongs to an age which possessed many documents relating to the history of the Britons which are now no longer extant."

It would be extremely important towards tracing the origin of the Cymry, if authentic and indisputable records of such traditions of their migration from the East can be found in their own legends at an age before learned conjecture could avail itself of the passages in Herodotus and Strabo, which relate to the Cimmerians, and tend to identify that people with our Cymrian ancestors. We find in the first (l. i. c. 14,) that the Cimmerians, chaced from their original settlements by the Nomadic Scythians, came to Lydia, where they took Sardis (except the citadel). In this account Strabo, on the authority of Callisthenes and Callinus, confirms Herodotus.

In flying from their Scythian foes, the Cimmerians took their course by the sea-coasts to Sinope, and the Cimmerian Bosphorus, and as, after this flight, the old Cimmerian league was broken up, and the tribes dispersed, this gives us the evident date for such migrations as Hu Gadarn is supposed to head; and the coincidence between Welch traditions (if genuinely ancient) and classical authority becomes very remarkable. For the additional corroboration of the hypothesis thus suggested, which is afforded by the identity between the Cimmerians of Asia and the Cimbri of Gaul, see Strabo (l. vii. p. 424, the Oxford edition, 1807.) It is curious to note in Herodotus (l. iv. c. 11) that the same domestic feuds which destroyed the Cymrian empire in Britain destroyed the Cimmerians in their original home. While the Scythians invaded them, they quarrelled amongst themselves whether to fight or fly, and settled the dispute by fighting each other, and flying from the enemy.

3 " ——— ——— *And frank Gawaine*
Whom mirth for ever, like a fairy child,
Lock'd from the cares of life.

Page 28, stanza c.

Some liberty, in the course of this poem, will be taken with the legendary character, less perhaps of the Gawaine of the Fabliaux, than of the Gwalchmai (Hawk of Battle) of the Welch bards. In both, indeed, this hero is represented as sage, courteous, and eloquent; but he is a livelier character in the Fabliaux than in the tales of his native land. The characters of many of the Cymrian heroes, indeed, vary according to the caprice of the poets. Thus Kai, in the Triads, one of the Three Diademed chiefs of battle, and a powerful magician, is, in the French romances, Messire Queux, the chief of the cooks; and in the Mabinogion,* he is at one time but an unlucky knight of

* I cannot quote the Mabinogion without expressing a grateful sense of the obligations Lady Charlotte Guest has conferred upon all lovers of our early literature, in her invaluable edition and translation of that interesting collection of British romances.

more valour than discretion, and at another time attains the dignity assigned to him in the Triads, and exults in supernatural attributes. And poor Gawaine himself, the mirror of chivalry, in most of the Fabliaux is, as Southey observes, 'shamefully calumniated' in the MORT D'ARTHUR as the "false Gawaine." The Caradoc of this poem is not intended to be identified with the hero Caradoc Vreichvras. The name was sufficiently common in Britain (it is the right reading for Caractacus) to allow to the use of the poet as many Caradocs as he pleases.

KING ARTHUR.

BOOK II.

ARGUMENT.

Introductory reflections—Arthur's absence—Caradoc's suspended epic—The deliberations of the three friends—Merlin seeks them—The trial of the enchanted forest—Merlin's soliloquy by the fountain—The return of the knights from the forest—Merlin's selection of the one permitted to join the King—The narrative returns to Arthur—The strange guide allotted to him—He crosses the sea, and arrives at the court of the Vandal—Ludovick, the Vandal King, described—His wily questions—Arthur's answers—The Vandal seeks his friend Astutio—Arthur leaves the court—Conference between Astutio and Ludovick—Astutio's profound statesmanship and subtle schemes—The Ambassador from Mercia—His address to Ludovick—The Saxons pursue Arthur—Meanwhile the Cymrian King arrives at the sea-shore—Description of the caves that intercept his progress—He turns inland—The Idol-shrine—The wolf and the priest.

BOOK II.

I.

Oft on the sands, in idle summer days,
Will childlike fondness write some cherished name,
Lull'd on the margin, while the wavelet plays,
And tides steal dreaming on:—Alas, the same
On human hearts Affection prints a trace,
The sands record it, and the tides efface.

II.

If absence parts, Hope, ready to console,
Whispers, "Be sooth'd, the absent shall return;"
If Death divides, a moment from the goal,
Love stays the step, and decks, but leaves, the urn,
Vowing remembrance;—let the year be o'er
And see, remembrance smiles like joy, once more!

III.

In street and mart still plys the busy craft;
Still Beauty trims for stealthy steps the bower;
By lips as gay the Hirlas horn* is quaft;
To the dark bourne still flies as fast the hour,
As when in Arthur men adored the sun;
And Life's large rainbow took its hues from One!

* The Hirlas, or drinking horn, made of the buffalo horn, enriched with gold or silver. The Hirlas song of "Owen Prince of Powys," is familiar to all lovers of Welch literature.

IV.

Yet ne'er by Prince more loved a crown was worn,
And had'st thou ventured but to hint the doubt
That loyal subjects ever ceased to mourn,
And that without him, earth was joy without,—
Thou soon hadst join'd in certain warm dominions
The horned friends of pestilent opinions.

V.

Thrice bless'd, O King, that on thy royal head
Fall the night dews; that the broad-spreading beech
Curtains thy sleep; that in the paths of dread,
Lonely, thou wanderest,—so thy steps may reach
RENOWN,—that bridge which spans the midnight sea
And joins two worlds,—Time and Eternity!

VI.

All is forgot save poetry; or whether
Haunting Time's river from the vocal reeds,
Or link'd not less in human souls together
With ends, which make the poetry of deeds;
For either poetry alike can shine—
From Hector's valour as from Homer's line.

VII.

Yet let me wrong ye not, ye faithful three,
Gawaine, and Caradoc, and Lancelot!
Gawaine's light lip had lost its laughing glee,
And gentle Caradoc had half forgot
That famous epic which his muse had hit on,
Of Trojan Brut—from whom the name of Briton.

VIII.

Therein Sir Brut, expell'd from flaming Troy,
Comes to this isle, and seeks to build a city,
Which Devils, then the Freeholders, destroy;
Till the sweet Virgin on Sir Brut takes pity,
And bids St. Bryan,* hurrying from the sky,
Baptize the astonish'd heathen in the Wye!

IX.

This done, the fiends at once disfranchised, fled;
Sir Brut repaid St. Bryan by a chapel,
Where masses daily were for Priam said;—
While thrice a week, the priests, that golden apple
By which three fiends, as goddesses disguised,
Bewitch'd Sir Paris,—anathematized.

X.

But now this epic, in its course suspended,
Slept on the shelf—(a not uncommon fate;)
Ah, who shall tell, if, ere resumed and ended,
That kind of poem be not out of date?
For of all ladies there are none who chuse
Such freaks and turns of fashion, as the Muse.

XI.

And thou, sad Lancelot; but there I hold;
Some griefs there are which grief alone can guess;
And so we leave whate'er he felt untold;
Light steps profane the heart's deep loneliness.
I, too, had once a friend in happier years!
He fled,—he owed,—forgot;—Forgive these tears!—

* Brân, *i. e.* St. Bryan (Poetice), the founder of one of the three sacred lineages of Britain, was the first introducer of Christianity among the Cymry.

XII.

Much, their sole comfort, much conversed the three
Upon their absent Arthur; what the cause
Of his self-exile, and its ends, could be;
Much did they ponder, hesitate, and pause
In high debate if loyal love might still
Pursue his wanderings, though against his will.

XIII.

But first the awe which kings command, restrained;
And next the ignorance of the path and goal;
So, thus for weeks they communed and remained;
Till o'er the woods a mellower verdure stole;
The bell-flower clothed the river-banks; the moon
Stood in the breathless firmament of June;

XIV.

When, as one twilight—near the forest-mount
They sate, and heard the vesper-bell afar
Swing from the dim Cathedral, and the fount
Hymn low its own sweet music to the star
Lone in the west—they saw a shadow pass
Where the pale beam shot silvering o'er the grass.

XV.

They turned, beheld their Cymri's mighty seer,
Majestic Merlin, and with reverence rose;
"Knights," said the soothsayer, smiling, "be of cheer
If yet, alone (the stars themselves his foes,)
Wanders the King,—now, of his faithful three
One, Fate permits; the choice with Fate must be.

XVI.

"Enter the forest—each his several way;
Return as dies in air the vesper chime;
The fiend the forest populace obey
Hath not o'er mortals empire in the time
When holy sounds the wings of Heaven invite;
And prayer hangs charm-like on the wheels of Night.

XVII.

"What seen, what heard, mark mindful, and relate;
Here will I tarry till your steps return."
Ne'er leapt the captive from the prison grate
With livelier gladness to the smiles of morn,
Than sprang those rivals to the forest-gloom,
And its dark arms closed round them like a tomb.

XVIII.

Before the fount, with thought-o'ershadowed brow,
The prophet stood, and bent a wistful eye
Along its starlit shimmer;—"Ev'n as now,"
He murmured, "didst thou lift thyself on high,
O symbol of my soul, and make thy course
One upward struggle to thy mountain source—

XIX.

"When first, a musing boy, I stood beside
Thy sparkling showers, and ask'd my restless heart
What secrets Nature to the herd denied
But might to earnest hierophant impart;
Then, in the boundless space around and o'er,
Thought whispered—'Rise, O seeker, and explore:

XX.

"'Can every leaf a teeming world contain,
In the least drop can race succeed to race,
Yet one death-slumber in its dreamless reign
Clasp all the illum'd magnificence of space—
Life crowd the drop—from air's vast seas effac'd—
The leaf a world—the firmament a waste?—'

XXI.

"And while Thought whispered, from thy shining spring
The glorious answer murmured—'Soul of Man,
Let the fount teach thee, and its struggle bring
Truth to thy yearnings!—whither I began
Thither I tend; my law is to aspire:
Spirit *thy* source, be spirit *thy* desire.'

XXII.

"And I have made the life of spirit mine;
And, on the margin of my mortal grave,
My soul, already in an air divine
Ev'n in its terrors,—starlit, seeks to cleave
Up to the height on which its source must be—
And falls again, in earthward showers, like thee.

XXIII.

"System on system climbing, sphere on sphere,
Upward for ever, ever, evermore,
Can all eternity not bring more near?
Is it in vain that I have sought to soar?
Vain as the Has been, is the long To be?
Type of my soul, O fountain, answer me!"

XXIV.

And while he spoke, behold the night's soft flowers,
Scentless to day, awoke, and bloom'd, and breathed;
Fed by the falling of the fountain's showers,
Round its green marge the grateful garland wreath'd;
The fount might fail its source on high to gain—
But ask the blossom if it soared in vain!

XXV.

The prophet mark'd, and, on his mighty brow,
Thought grew resign'd, serene, though mournful still.
Now ceased the vesper, and the branches now
Stirr'd on the margin of the forest hill—
And Gawaine came into the starlit space—
Slow was his step, and sullen was his face.

XXVI.

"What didst thou see?"—"The green-wood and the sky."
"What hear?"—"The light leaf dropping on the sward."
And now, with front elate and hopeful eye,
Stood, in the starlight, Caradoc the bard;
The prophet smiled on that fair face (akin
Poet and prophet) "Child of Song, begin."

XXVII.

"I saw a glowworm light his fairy lamp,
Close where a little torrent forced its way
Through broad leaved water-sedge, and alder damp;
Above the glowworm, from some lower spray
Of the near mountain-ash, the silver song
Of night's sweet chorister came clear and strong;

XXVIII.

" No thrilling note of melancholy wail;
Ne'er pour'd the thrush more musical delight
Through noon-day laurels, than that nightingale
In the lone forest to the ear of Night—
Ev'n as the light web by Arachne spun,
From bough to bough suspended in the sun,

XXIX.

" Ensnares the heedless insect,—so, methought
Midway in air my soul arrested hung
In the melodious meshes; never aught
To mortal lute was so divinely sung!
Surely, O prophet, these the sound and sign,
Which make the lot, the search determines, mine."

XXX.

" O self-deceit of man!" the soothsayer sigh'd,
" The worm but lent its funeral torch the ray;
The night bird's joy but hail'd the fatal guide,
In the bright glimmer, to its thoughtless prey.
And thou, bold-eyed one—in the forest, what
Met *thy* firm footstep?"—Out spoke Lancelot—

XXXI.

" I pierced the forest till a pool I reached,
Ne'er mark'd before—a dark yet lucid wave;
High from a blasted oak the night owl screeched,
An otter crept from out its water-cave,
The owl grew silent when it heard my tread—
The otter mark'd my shadow, and it fled.

XXXII.

" This all I saw, and all I heard."—" Rejoice!"
The enchanter cried, " for thee the omens smile;
On thee propitious Fate hath fix'd the choice;
And thou the comrade in the glorious toil.
In death the poet only music heard;
But death gave way when life's firm soldier stirr'd.

XXXIII.

" Forth ride, a dauntless champion, with the morn;
But let the night the champion nerve with prayer;
Higher and higher from the heron borne,
Wheels thy brave falcon to the heavenliest air,
Poises his wings, far towering o'er the foe,
And hangs aloft, before he swoops below;

XXXIV.

" Man, let the falcon teach thee!—Now, from land
To land thy guide, receive this chrystal ring;
See, in the chrystal moves a fairy hand,
Still, where it moveth, moves the wandering King—
Or east, or north, or south, or west, where'er
Points the sure hand, thy onward path be there!

XXXV.

" Thine hour comes soon, young Gawaine! to the port
The light heart boundeth o'er the stormiest wave;
And thou, fair favourite in Gwyn-ab-Nudd's* court,
Whom fairies realms in every fancy gave;
Fear not from glory exiled long to be,
What toil to others, Nature brings to thee."

* GWYN-AB-NUDD, the king of the fairies. He is, also, sometimes less pleasingly delineated, as the king of the infernal regions; the Welsh Pluto—much the same as, in the chivalric romance writers, Proserpine is sometimes made the queen of the fairies.

XXXVI.

Thus with kind word, well chosen, unto each
Spoke the benign enchanter; and the twain,
Less favoured, heart and comfort from his speech
Hopeful conceived; the prophet up the plain,
Gathering weird simples, pass'd—to Carduel they;
And song escapes to Arthur's lonely way.

XXXVII.

On towards the ocean-shore (for thus the seer
Enjoin'd)—the royal knight, deep musing, rode;
Winding green margins, till more near and near
Unto the main the exulting river flow'd.
Here too a guide, when reach'd the mightier wave,
The heedful promise of the prophet gave.

XXXVIII.

Where the sea flashes on the argent sands,
Soars from a lonely rock a snow white dove;
No bird more beauteous to immortal lands
Bore Psyche rescued side by side with Love.
Ev'n as some thought which, pure of earthly taint,
Springs from the chaste heart of a virgin saint,

XXXIX.

It hovers in the heaven;—and from its wings
Shakes the clear dewdrops of unsullying seas;
Then circling gently in slow-measured rings,
Nearer and nearer to its goal it flees,
And drooping, fearless, on that noble breast,
Murmuring low joy, it cooes itself to rest.

XL.

The grateful King, with many a soothing word,
And bland caress, the guileless trust repaid;
When, gently gliding from his hand, the bird
Went fluttering where the hollow headlands made
A boat's small harbour; Arthur from the chain
Released the raft,—it shot along the main.

XLI.

Now in that boat, beneath the eyes of heaven,
Floated the three, the steed, the bird, the man;
To favouring winds the little sail was given;
The shore fail'd gradual, dwindling to a span;
The steed bent wistful o'er the watery realm;
And the white dove perch'd tranquil at the helm.

XLII.

Haply by fisherman, its owner, left,
Within the boat were rude provisions stor'd;
The yellow harvest from the wild bee reft,
Bread, roots, dried fish, the luxuries of a board
Health spreads for toil; while skins and flasks of reed
Yield these the water, those the strengthening mead.

XLIII.

Five days, five nights, still onward, onward o'er
Light-swelling waves, bounded the bark its way;
At last the sun set reddening on a shore;
Walls on the cliff, and war-ships in the bay;
While from bright towers, o'erlooking sea and plain,
The Leopard-banners told the Vandals' reign.

XLIV.

Amid those shifting royalties, the North
Pour'd from its teeming breast, in tumult driven,
Now to, now fro, as thunder-clouds sent forth
To darken, burst,—and bursting, clear the heaven;
Ere yet the Nomad nations found repose,
And order dawn'd as Charlemain arose;

XLV.

Amidst that ferment of fierce races, won
To yonder shores a wandering Vandal horde,
Whose chief exchanged his war-tent for a throne,
And shaped a sceptre from a conqueror's sword;
His sons, expell'd by rude intestine broil,
Sought that worst wilderness—the Stranger's soil.

XLVI.

A distant kinsman, Ludovick his name,
With them was exil'd, and with them return'd.
A prince of popular and patriot fame;
To roast his egg your house he would have burn'd!
A patriot soul no ties of kindred knows—
His kinsman's palace was the house he chose.

XLVII.

A patriot gamester playing for a Crown,
He watch'd the hazard with indifferent air,
Rebuked well-wishers with a gentle frown,
Then dropp'd the whisper—"What I win I share."
Who plays for power should make the odds so fall,
That one man's luck should seem the gain of all.

XLVIII.

The moment came, disorder split the realm;
Too stern the ruler, or too feebly stern;
The supple kinsman slided to the helm,
And trimm'd the rudder with a dexterous turn;
A turn so dexterous, that it served to fling
Both over board—the people and the king!

XLIX.

The captain's post repaid the pilot's task,
He seized the ship as he had cleared the prow;
Drop we the metaphor as he the mask:
And, while his gaping Vandals wondered how,
Behold the patriot to the despot grown,
Filch'd from the fight, and juggled to the throne!

L.

And bland in words was wily Ludovick!
Much did he promise, nought did he fulfil;
The trickster Fortune loves the hands that trick,
And smiled approving on her conjuror's skill!
The promised freedom vanished in a tax,
And bays, turn'd briars, scourged bewildered backs.

LI.

Soon is the landing of the stranger knight
Known at the court; and courteously the king
Gives to his guest the hospitable rite;
Heralds the tromp, and harpers wake the string;
Rich robes of miniver the mail replace,
And the bright banquet sparkles on the daïs.

LII.

Where on the wall the cloth, goldwoven, glow'd,
Beside his chair of state, the Vandal lord
Made room for that fair stranger, as he strode,
With a king's footstep, to the kingly board.
In robes so nobly worn, the wise old man
Saw some great soul, which cunning whispered 'scan.'

LIII.

A portly presence had the realm-deceiver;
An eye urbane, a people-catching smile,
A brow, of webs the everlasting weaver,
Where jovial frankness mask'd the serious guile;
Each word, well aim'd, he feathered with a jest,
And, unsuspected, shot into the breast.

LIV.

Gaily he welcomed Arthur to the feast,
And press'd the goblet, which unties the tongue;
As the bowl circled so his speech increast,
And chose such flatteries as seduce the young;
Seeming in each kind question more to blend
The fondling father with the anxious friend.

LV.

If frank the prince, esteem him not the less;
The soul of knighthood loves the truth of man;
The boons he sought 't was needful to suppress,
Not mask the seeker; so the prince began—
"Arthur my name, from MEL YNYS * I come,
And the steep homes of Cymri's Christendom.

* MEL YNYS, the Isle of Honey, the old Welch name for England.

LVI.

"Five days ago, in Carduel's halls a king,
A lonely pilgrim now o'er lands and seas,
I seek such fame as gallant deeds can bring,
And hope from danger gifts denied to ease;
Lore from experience, thought from toil to gain,
And learn as man how best as king to reign."

LVII.

The Vandal smiled, and praised the high design;
Then, careless, questioned of the Cymrian land:
'Was earth propitious to the corn and vine?
Was the sun genial?—were the breezes bland?
Did gold and gem the mountain mines conceal?'
"Our soil bears manhood, and our mountains steel,"

LVIII.

The Monarch answered; "and where these are found,
All plains yield harvests, and all mines the gold."
"Your hills are doubtless," quoth the Vandal, "crown'd
With castled tower, and fosse-defended hold?"
"One hold the land—its mightiest fosse the sea;
And its strong walls the bosoms of the free."

LIX.

The Vandal mused, and thought the answers shrewd,
But little suited to the listeners by;
So turn'd the subject, nor again renewed
Sharp questions blunted by such bold reply.
Now ceased the banquet; to a chamber, spread
With fragrant heath, his guest the Vandal led.

LX.

With his own hand unclasp'd the mantle's fold,
And took his leave in blessings without number;
Bade every angel shelter from the cold,
And every saint watch sleepless o'er the slumber;
Then his own chamber sought, and rack'd his breast
To find some use to which to put the guest.

LXI.

Three days did Arthur sojourn in that court;
And much he marvelled how that warlike race
Bowed to a chief, whom never knightly sport,
The gallant tourney, or the glowing chace
Allured; and least those glory-lighted dyes
Which make Death lovely in a warrior's eyes.

LXII.

Yet, midst his marvel, much the Cymrian sees
For king to imitate and sage to praise;
Splendour and thrift in nicely poised degrees,
Caution that guards, and promptness that dismays;
But Fraud will oftimes make the fate it fears;—
Some day, found stifled by the mask it wears.

LXIII.

On his part, Arthur in such estimation
Did the host hold, that he proposed to take
A father's charge of his forsaken nation.
'He loved not meddling, but for Arthur's sake,
Would leave his own, his guest's affairs to mind.'
An offer Arthur thankfully declined.

LXIV.

Much grieved the Vandal 'that he just had given
His last unwedded daughter to a Frank,
But still he had a wifeless son, thank heaven!
Not yet provision'd as beseem'd his rank,
And one of Arthur's sisters——' Uther's son
Smiled, and replied—"Sir king, I have but one,

LXV.

"Borne by my mother to her former lord;
Not young."—"Alack! youth cannot last like riches."
"Not fair."—"Then youth is less to be deplored."
"A witch."*—"*All* women till they're wed *are* witches!
Wived to my son, the witch will soon be steady!"
"Wived to your son?—she is a wife already!"

LXVI.

O baseless dreams of man! The king stood mute!
That son, of all his house the favourite flower,
How had he sought to force it into fruit,
And graft the slip upon a lusty dower!
And this sole sister of a king so rich,
A wife already!—Saints consume the witch!

LXVII.

With brow deject, the mournful Vandal took
Occasion prompt to leave his royal guest,
And sought a friend who served him, as a book
Read in our illness, in our health dismist;
For seldom did the Vandal condescend
To that poor drudge which monarchs call a friend!

* The witch MOURGE, or MORGANA, (historically ANNA), was Arthur's sister.

LXVIII.

And yet Astutio was a man of worth
Before the brain had reasoned out the heart;
But now he learned to look upon the earth
As peddling hucksters look upon the mart;
Took souls for wares, and conscience for a till;
And damn'd his fame to serve his master's will.

LXIX.

Much lore he had in men, and states, and things,
And kept his memory mapp'd in prim precision,
With histories, laws, and pedigrees of kings,
And moral saws, which ran through each division,
All neatly colour'd with appropriate hue—
The histories black, the morals heavenly blue!

LXX.

But state-craft, mainly, was his pride and boast;
"The golden medium" was his guiding star,
Which means "move on until you 're uppermost,
And then things can't be better than they are!"
Brief, in two rules he summ'd the ends of man—
"Keep all you have, and try for all you can!"

LXXI.

While these conferred, fair Arthur wistfully
Look'd from the lattice of his stately room;
The rainbow spann'd the ocean of the sky,
An arch of glory in the midst of gloom;
So light from dark by lofty souls is won,
And on the rain-cloud they reflect the sun.

LXXII.

As such, perchance, his thought, the snow-white dove,
Which at the threshold of the Vandal's towers
Had left his side, came circling from above,
Athwart the rainbow and the sparkling showers,
Flew through the open lattice, paused, and sprung
Where on the wall the abandoned armour hung;

LXXIII.

Hovered above the lance, the mail, the crest,
Then back to Arthur, and with querelous cries,
Peck'd at the clasp that bound the flowing vest,
Chiding his dalliance from the arm'd emprize,
So Arthur deem'd; and soon from head to heel
Blazed War's dread statue, sculptured from the steel.

LXXIV.

Then through the doorway flew the wingëd guide,
Skimm'd the long gallery, shunn'd the thronging hall,
And, through deserted posterns, led the stride
Of its arm'd follower to the charger's stall;
Loud neigh'd the destrier (2) at the welcome clang,
And drowsy horseboys into service sprang.

LXXV.

Though threaten'd danger well the prince divined,
He deem'd it churlish in ungracious haste
Thus to depart, nor thank a host so kind;
But when the step the courteous thought retraced,
With breast and wing the dove opposed his way,
And warn'd with scaring scream the rash delay.

LXXVI.

The King reluctant yields. Now in the court
Paws with impatient hoof the barbèd steed;
Now yawn the sombre portals of the fort;
Creaks the hoarse drawbridge;—now the walls are freed.
Thro' dun woods hanging o'er the ocean tide,
Glimmers the steel, and gleams the angel-guide.

LXXVII.

An opening glade upon the headland's brow
Sudden admits the ocean and the day.
Lo! the waves cleft before the gilded prow,
Where the tall war-ship, towering, sweeps to bay.
Why starts the King?—High over mast and sail
The Saxon Horse rides ghastly in the gale!

LXXVIII.

Grateful to heaven, and heaven's plum'd messenger,
He raised his reverent eyes, then shook the rein:
Bounded the barb, disdainful of the spur,
Clear'd the steep cliff, and scour'd along the plain.
Still, while he sped, the swifter wings that lead
Seem to rebuke for sloth the swiftening steed.

LXXIX.

Nor cause unmeet for grateful thought, I ween,
Had the good King; nor vainly warn'd the bird;
Nor idly fled the steed; as shall be seen,
If, where the Vandal and his friend conferr'd,
Awhile our path retracing, we relate
What craft deems guiltless when the craft of state.

LXXX.

"Sire," quoth Astutio, "well I comprehend
Your cause for grief; the seedsman breaks the ground
For the new plant; new thrones that would extend
Their roots, must loosen all the earth around;
For trees and thrones no rule than this more true,
What most disturbs the old best serves the new.

LXXXI.

"Thus all ways wise to push your princely son
Under the soil of Cymri's ancient stem;
And if the ground the thriving plant had won,
What prudent man will plants that thrive, condemn?
Sir, in your move a master hand is seen,
Your well play'd bishop caught both towers and queen."

LXXXII.

"And now checkmate!" the wretched sire exclaims,
With watering eyes, and mouth that watered too.
"Nay," quoth the sage; "a match means many games.
Replace the pieces, and begin anew.
"You want this Cymrian's crown—the want is just."—
"But how to get it?"—"Sir, with ease, I trust."

LXXXIII.

"The witch is married—better that than burn;
(A well-known text—to witches not applied)
But let that pass:—great sir to Anglia turn,
And mate your Vandal with a Saxon bride.
Her dower,"—Cried Ludovick, "The dower's the thing!"
"The lands and sceptre of the Cymrian King."

LXXXIV.

Then to that anxious sire the learned man
Bared the large purpose latent in his speech;
O'er Britain's gloomy history glibly ran;
Anglia's new kingdoms, he described them each;
But most himself to Mercia he addresses,
For Mercia's king, great man, hath two princesses!

LXXXV.

Long on this glowing theme enlarged the sage,
And turn'd, return'd, and turn'd it o'er again;
Thus when a mercer would your greed engage
In some fair silk, or cloth of comely grain,
He spreads it out—upholds it to the sun—
Strokes and restrokes it, and the pelf is won!

LXXXVI.

He showed the Saxon hungering to devour
The last unconquer'd realm the Cymrian boasts;
He dwelt at length on Mercia's gathering power,
Swell'd, year by year, from Elbe's unfailing hosts;
Then proved how Mercia scarcely could retain
Beneath the sceptre what the sword might gain.

LXXXVII.

'For Mercia's vales from Cymri's hills are far,
And Mercian warriors hard to keep a-field;
And men fresh conquer'd stormy subjects are;
What can't be held 't is no great loss to yield;
And still the Saxon might secure his end,
If where the foe had reign'd he left the friend.

LXXXVIII.

'Nay, what so politick in Mercia's king
As on that throne a son-in-law to place?'
While thus they saw their birds upon the wing
Ere hatched the egg,—as is the common case
With large capacious minds, the natural heirs
Of that vast property—the things not theirs!

LXXXIX.

In comes a herald—comes with startling news:
A Saxon chief has anchored in the bay,
From Mercia's king ambassador, and sues
The royal audience ere the close of day.
The wise old men upon each other stare.
"While monarchs counsel, thus the saints prepare,"

XC.

Astutio murmur'd, with a pious smile.
"Admit the noble Saxon," quoth the king.
The two laugh out, and rub their palms, the while
The herald speeds the ambassador to bring;
And soon a chief, fair-haired, erect, and tall,
With train and trumpet, strides along the hall.

XCI.

Upon his wrist a falcon, bell'd, he bore;
Leash'd at his heels six blood-hounds grimly stalked;
A broad round shield was slung his breast before;
The floors reclang'd with armour as he walk'd;
He gained the daïs; his standard-bearer spread
Broadly the banner o'er his helmëd head

XCII.

And thrice the tromp his blazon'd herald woke,
And hail'd Earl Harold from the Mercian king.
Full on the Vandal gazed the earl, and spoke:
"Greeting from Crida, Woden's heir, I bring,
And these plain words;—'The Saxon's steel is bare,
Red harvests wait it—will the Vandal share?

XCIII.

"'Hengist first chaced the Briton from the vale;
Crida would hound the Briton from the hill;
Stern hands have loosed the Pale Horse on the gale;
The Horse shall halt not till the winds are still.
Be ours your foemen,—be your foemen shown,
And we in turn will smite them as our own.

XCIV.

"'We need allies—in you allies we call;
Your shores oppose the Cymrian's mountain sway;
Your armëd men stand idle in your hall;
Your vessels rot within your crowded bay:
Send three full squadrons to the Mercian bands—
Send seven tall war-ships to the Cymrian lands.

XCV.

"'If this you grant, as from the old renown,
Of Vandal valour, Saxon men believe,
Our arms will solve all question to your crown;
If not, the heirs you banish we receive;
But one rude maxim Saxon bluntness knows—
We serve our friends, who are not friends are foes!

XCVI.

"'Thus speaks King Crida.'" Not the manner much
Of that brief speech wise Lodovick admired;
But still the matter did so nearly touch
The great state-objects recently desired,
That the sage brows dismist in haste the frown,
And lips sore-smiling gulp'd resentment down.

XCVII.

Fair words he gave, and friendly hints of aid,
And pray'd the envoy in his halls to rest;
And more, in truth, to please the earl had said,
But that the sojourn of the earlier guest
(For not the parting of the Cymrian known)
Forbade his heart too broadly to be shown.

XCVIII.

But ere a long and oily speech had closed,
Astutio, who the hall, when it begun,
Had left, to seek the prince, (whom he proposed,
If yet the tidings to his ear had won
Of his foe's envoy, by some smooth pretext
To lull) came back with visage much perplext—

XCIX.

And whispered Ludovick—"The King has fled!"
The Vandal stammer'd, stared, but versed in all
The quick resources of a wily head,
That out of evil still a good could call,
He did but pause, with more effect to wing
The stone that chance thus fitted to his sling.

C.

"Saxon," he said, "thus far we had premised,
And if still wavering, not our heart in fault.
Three days ago, the Cymrian king, disguised,
First drank our cup, and tasted of our salt,
And hence our zeal to aid you we represt,
Least men should say, 'the Vandal wrong'd his guest.'

CI.

"Lo, while we speak, the saints the bond release;
Arthur hath gone from us;—the host is free."
"Arthur—the Cymrian!" cried the envoy. "Peace;
In deeds, not words, men's love the Saxons see:
Gone!—whither wends he? But a word I need—
Leave to the rest my bloodhounds and my steed."

CII.

Dumb sate the Vandal, dumb with fear and shame,
No slave to virtue, but its shade was he;
A tower of strength is in an honest name—
'T is wise to seem what oft 't is dull to be!
A kingly host a kingly guest betray!
The chafing Saxon brook'd not that delay—

CIII.

But turn'd his sparkling eyes behind, and saw
His knights and squires with zeal as fierce inflamed,
And out he spoke—"The hospitable law
We will not trench, whate'er the guest hath claim'd
Let the host yield; forgive, that, hotly stirr'd,
His course I question'd; I retract the word.

CIV.

"If on your hearth he stands, protect; within
Your realm if wandering, guard him as you may;
This hearth not ours, nor this our realm;—no sin
To chace our foeman, whatsoe'er his way:
Up spear—forth sword! to selle each Saxon man—
Unleash the warhounds—stay us those who can!"

CV.

Loud rang the armëd tumult in the hall;
Rush'd to the doors the Saxon's fiery band;
Yell'd the gaunt bloodhounds loosened from the thrall;
Steeds neigh'd; leapt forth the falchion to the hand;
Low on the earth the bloodhounds track'd the scent,
And where they guided there the hunters went.

CVI.

Amazed the Vandal with his friend debates
What course were best in such extremes to choose;
Nicely they weigh;—the Saxons pass the gates:
Finely refine;—the chace its prey pursues.
And while the chace pursues, to him, whose way
The dove directs, well pleased, returns the lay.

CVII.

Twilight was on the earth, when paused the King
Lone by the beach of far-resounding seas;
Rock upon rock, behind, a Titan ring,
Closed round a gorge o'erhung with breathless trees,
A horror of still umbrage; and, before,
Wave-hollow'd caves arch'd, ruinous, the shore.

CVIII.

Column and vault, and seaweed-dripping domes,
Long vistas opening through the streets of dark,
Seem'd like a city's skeleton; the homes
Of giant races vanish'd since the ark
Rested on Ararat: from side to side
Moan'd the lock'd waves that ebb not with the tide.

CIX.

Here, path forbid; where, length'ning up the land,
The deep gorge stretches to a night of pine,
Veer the white wings; and there the slacken'd hand
Guides the tired steed; deeplier the shades decline;
Dull'd with each step into the darker gloom
Follows the ocean's hollow-sounding boom.

CX.

Sudden starts back the steed, with bristling mane
And nostrils snorting fear; from out the shade
Loom the vast columns of a roofless fane,
Meet for some god whom savage man hath made:
A mighty pine-torch on the altar glow'd
And lit the goddess of the grim abode—

CXI.

So that the lurid idol, from its throne,
Glared on the wanderer with a stony eye;
The King breathed quick the Christian orison,
Spurr'd the scared barb, and passed abhorrent, by—
Nor mark'd a figure on the floor reclin'd;
It watch'd, it rose, it crept, it dogg'd behind.

CXII.

Three days, three nights, within that dismal shrine,
Had couch'd that man, and hungered for his prey.
Chieftain and priest of hordes that from the Rhine
Had track'd in carnage thitherwards their way;
Fell souls that still maintained their rites of yore,
And hideous altars rank with human gore.

CXIII.

By monstrous Oracles a coming foe,
Whose steps appal his gods, hath been foretold;
The fane must fall unless the blood shall flow;
Therefore three days, three nights, he watch'd;—behold
At last the death-torch of the blazing pine
Darts on the foe the lightning of the shrine!

CXIV.

Stealthily on, amidst the bushwood, crept
With practised foot, and unrelaxing eye,
The steadfast Murder;—where the still leaf slept
The still leaf stirr'd not: as it glided by
The mosses gave no echo; not a breath!
Nature was hush'd as if in league with Death!

CXV.

As moved the man, so, on the opposing side
Of the deep gorge, with purpose like his own,
Did steps as noiseless to the blood-feast glide;
And as the man before his idol's throne
Had watch'd,—so watch'd, since daylight left the air,
A giant wolf within its leafy lair.

CXVI.

Whether the blaze allured, or hunger stung,
There still had cower'd, and crouch'd the beast of prey;
With lurid eyes unwinking, spell-bound, clung
To the near ridge that faced the torchlit way;
As the steed pass'd, it rose! On either side,
Here glides the wild beast, there the man doth glide.

CXVII.

But, all unconscious of the double foe,
Paused Arthur, where his resting-place the dove
Seem'd to select,—his couch a mound below;
A bowering beech his canopy above:
From his worn steed the barded mail released,
And left it, reinless, to its herbage-feast.

CXVIII.

Then from his brow the mighty helm unbraced,
And from his breast the hauberk's heavy load;
On the tree's trunk the trophied arms he placed,
And, ere to rest the weary limbs bestow'd,
Thrice sign'd the cross the fiends of night to scare,
And guarded helpless sleep with potent prayer.

CXIX.

Then on the moss-grown couch he laid him down,
Fearless of night and hopeful for the morn:
On Slumber's lap the head without a crown
Forgot the gilded trouble it had worn;
The Warrior slept—the browsing charger stray'd—
The dove, unsleeping, watch'd amidst the shade.

CXX.

And now, on either hand the dreaming King,
Death halts to strike: the crouching wild beast, here,
From the close crag prepares the rushing spring;
There, from the thicket creeping, near and near,
Steals the wild man, and listens for a sound—
Lifts the pale steel, and gathers for the bound.

CXXI.

But what befell? O thou, whose gentle heart
Lists, scornful not, this undiurnal rhyme;
If, as thy steps to busier life depart,
Still in thine ear rings low the haunting chime,
When leisure suits once more forsake the throng,
Call childhood back, and redemand the song.

NOTES TO BOOK II.

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1 "*Therein Sir Brut, expelled from flaming Troy.*"
Page 41, stanza viii.

Caradoc's version of the descent of Brut differs somewhat from that of Geoffrey of Monmouth, but perhaps it is quite as true. According to Geoffrey, Brut is great-grandson to Æneas, and therefore not expelled from "*flaming* Troy." Caradoc follows his own (no doubt authentic) legends, also, as to the aboriginal population of the island, which, according to Geoffrey, were giants, not devils. The cursory and contemptuous way in which that delicious Romance writer speaks of these poor giants is inimitable—"*Albion à nemine, exceptis paucis gigantibus, inhabitabatur.*"—"Albion was inhabited by nobody—*except, indeed, a few giants!*"

2 "*Loud neigh'd the destrier at the welcome clang.*"
Page 57, stanza lxxiv.

Destrier;—This word has been objected to, but it is so familiarly used by our Anglo-Norman minstrels, as well as by the great Masters of romantic poetry, that I have ventured, though not without diffidence, to retain it. MONTAIGNE, in his chapter on "the Warhorses called Destriers," derives the word from the Latin, *Dextrarius*

KING ARTHUR.

BOOK III.

ARGUMENT.

Arthur still sleeps—The sounds that break his rest—The war between the beast and the man—How ended—The Christian foe and the heathen—The narrative returns to the Saxons in pursuit of Arthur—Their chace is stayed by the caverns described in the preceding book, the tides having now advanced up the gorge through which Arthur passed, and blocked that pathway—The hunt is resumed at dawn—The tides have receded from the gorge—One of the hounds finds scent—The riders are on the track—Harold heads the pursuit—The beech tree—The man by the water-spring—The wood is left—The knight on the brow of the hill—Parley between the earl and the knight—The encounter—Harold's address to his men, and his foe—His foe's reply—The dove and the falcon—The unexpected succour—And conclusion of the fray—The narrative passes on to the description of the Happy Valley—In which the dwellers await the coming of a stranger—History of the Happy Valley—a colony founded by Etrurians from Fiesolè, forewarned of the destined growth of the Roman dominion—Its strange seclusion and safety from the changes of the ancient world—The law that forbade the daughters of the Lartian or ruling family to marry into other clans—Only one daughter (the queen) is left now, and the male line in the whole Lartian clan is extinct—The contrivance of the Augur for the continuance of the royal house, sanctioned by two former precedents—A stranger is to be lured into the valley—The simple dwellers therein to be deceived into believing him a god—He is to be married to the queen, and then, on the birth of a son, to vanish again amongst the gods, (*i. e.* to be secretly made away with)—Two temples at the opposite ends of the valley give the only gates to the place—By the first, dedicated to Tina, (the Etrurian Jove,) the stranger is to be admitted—In the second, dedicated to Mantu, (the god of the shades,) he is destined to vanish—Such a stranger is now expected in the happy valley—He emerges, led by the Augur, from the temple of Tina—Ægle, the queen, described—Her stranger-bridegroom is led to her bower.

BOOK III.

I.

We raise the curtain where the unconscious King
Beneath the beech his fearless couch had made;
Here, the fierce fangs prepared their deadly spring;
There, in the hand of Murder gleamed the blade;
And not a sound to warn him from above;
Where, still unsleeping, watch'd the guardian dove!

II.

Hark, a dull crash!—a howling, ravenous yell!
Opening fell symphony of ghastly sound,
Jarring yet blent, as if the dismal hell
Sent its strange anguish from the rent Profound:
Through all its scale the horrible discord ran,
Now mock'd the beast, now took the groan of man;

III.

Wrath, and the grind of gnashing teeth; the growl
Of famine routed from its red repast;
Sharp shrilling pain; and fury from some soul
That fronts despair, and wrestles to the last.
Up sprang the King—the moon's uncertain ray
Through the still leaves just wins its glimmering way

IV.

And lo, before him, close, yet wanly faint,
Forms that seem shadows, strife that seems the sport
Of things that oft some holy hermit saint
Lone in Egyptian plains—(the dread resort
Of Nile's dethronëd demon gods) hath viewed;
The grisly tempters, born of Solitude:—

V.

Coil'd in the strong death-grapple, through the dim
And haggard air, before the Cymrian lay
Writhing and interlaced, with fang and limb,
As if one shape, what seem'd a beast of prey
And the grand form of Man!—The bird of Heaven
Wisely no note to warn the sleep had given;

VI.

The sleep protected;—as the Savage sprang
Sprang the wild beast;—before the dreamer's breast
Defeated Murder found the hungry fang,
The wolf the steel;—so, starting from his rest
The saved man woke to save! Nor time was here
For pause or caution; for the sword or spear;

VII.

Clasp'd round the wolf, swift arms of iron draw
From their fierce hold the buried fangs;—on high
Up-borne, the baffled terrors of its jaw
Gnash vain;—one yell howls, hollow, through the sky;
And dies abruptly, stifled to a gasp,
As the grim heart pants crushing in the grasp.

VIII.

Fit for a nation's bulwark, that strong breast
To which the strong arms lock'd the powerless foe!—
Nor oped the vice till breath's last anguish ceast;
'Tis done; and dumb the dull weight drops below.
The kindred form, which now the King surveys,
Those arms, all gentle as a woman's, raise.

IX.

Leaning the pale cheek on his pitying heart,
He wipes the blood from face, and breast, and limb,
And joyful sees (for no humaner art
Which Christian knighthood knows, unknown to him,)
That the fell fangs the nobler parts forbore,
And, thanks, sweet Virgin!—life returns once more.

X.

The savage stared around: from dizzy eyes
Toss'd the loose shaggy hair; and to his knee,—
His reeling feet—up stagger'd—Lo, where lies
The dead wild beast!—lo, in his saviour, see
The fellow-man, whom;—with a feeble bound
He leapt, and snatch'd the dagger from the ground;

XI.

And, faithful to his gods, he sprang to slay;
The weak limb fail'd him; gleam'd and dropp'd the blade;
The arm hung nerveless;—by the beast of prey
Murder, still baffled, fell:—Then, soothing, said
The gentle King—"Behold no foe in me!"
And knelt by Hate like pitying Charity.

XII.

In suffering man he could not find a foe,
And the mild hand clasp'd that which yearn'd to kill!
"Ha," gasp'd the gazing savage, "dost thou know
That I had doom'd thee in thy sleep?—that still
My soul would doom thee, could my hand obey?—
Wake thou, stern goddess—seize thyself the prey!"

XIII.

"Serv'st thou a goddess," said the wondering King,
"Whose rites ask innocent blood?—O brother, learn
In heaven, in earth, in each created thing,
One God, whom all call 'FATHER,' to discern!"
"Can thy God suffer thy God's foe to live?"—
"God once had foes, and said to man, 'Forgive!'"

XIV.

The Christian answered. Dream-like the mild words
Fell on the ear, as sense again gave way
To swooning sleep; which woke but with the birds
In the cold clearness of the dawning day.—
Strung by that sleep, the savage scowl'd around;
Why droops his head? Kind hands his wounds have bound.

XV.

Lonely he stood, and miss'd that tender foe;
The wolf's glazed eye-ball mutely met his own;
Beyond, the pine-brand sent its sullen glow,
Circling blood-red the awful altar-stone;
Blood-red, as sinks the sun, from land afar,
Ere tempests wreck the Amalfian mariner;

XVI.

Or as, when Mars sits in the House of Death
For doom'd Aleppo, on the hopeless Moor
Glares the fierce orb from skies without a breath,
While the chalk'd signal on the abhorrëd door
Tells that the Pestilence is come!—The pine
Unheeded wastes upon the hideous shrine;

XVII.

The priest returns not;—from its giant throne,
The idol calls in vain:—its realm is o'er;
The Dire Religion flies the altar-stone,
For love has breath'd on what was hate before.
Lured by man's heart, by man's kind deeds subdued,
Him who had pardoned, he who wrong'd pursued.

XVIII.

Meanwhile speeds on the Saxon chace, behind;—
Baffled at first, and doubling to and fro,
At last the war-dogs snorting, seize the wind,
Burst on the scent, which gathers as they go;
Day wanes, night comes; the star succeeds the sun,
To light the hunt until the quarry's won.

XIX.

At the first grey of dawn, they halt before
The fretted arches of the giant caves;
For here the tides rush full upon the shore.
The failing scent is snatch'd amidst the waves,—
Waves block the entrance of the gorge unseen;
And roar, hoarse-surging, up the pent ravine.

XX.

And worn, and spent, and panting, flag the steeds,
With mail and man bow'd down; nor meet to breast
The hell of waters, whence no pathway leads,
And which no plummet sounds;—Reluctant rest
Checks the pursuit, till sullenly and slow
Back, threatening still, the hosts of Ocean go,—

XXI.

And the bright clouds that circled the fair sun
Melt in the azure of the mellowing sky;
Then hark again the human hunt begun,
The ringing hoof, the hunter's cheering cry;
Round and around, by sand, and cave, and steep,
The doubtful ban-dogs, undulating, sweep:

XXII.

At length, one windeth where the wave hath left
The unguarded portals of the gorge, and there
Far-wandering halts; and from a rocky cleft
Spreads his keen nostril to the whispering air;
Then, with trail'd ears, moves cowering o'er the ground,
The deep bay booming breaks:—the scent is found.

XXIII.

Hound answers hound,—along the dank ravine
Pours the fresh wave of spears and tossing plumes;
On—on; and now the idol-shrine obscene
The dying pine-brand flickeringly illumes;
The dogs go glancing through the shafts of stone,
Trample the altar, hurtle round the throne:

XXIV.

Where the lone priest had watch'd, they pause awhile;
Then forth, hard-breathing, down the gorge they swoop;
Soon the swart woods that close the far defile
Gleam with the shimmer of the steel-clad troop:
Glinting through leaves—now bright'ning through the glade,
Now lost, dispersed amidst the matted shade.

XXV.

Foremost rode Harold, on a matchless steed,
Whose sire, from Afric coasts a sea-king bore,
And gave the Mercian, as his noblest meed,
When (beardless yet) to Norway's Runic shore
Against a common foe, the Saxon Thane
Led three tall ships, and loosed them on the Dane:

XXVI.

Foremost he rode, and on his mailëd breast
Cranch'd the strong branches of the groaning oak.
Hark, with full peal, as suddenly supprest,
Behind, the ban-dog's choral joy-cry broke!
Led by the note, he turns him back, to reach,
Near the wood's marge, a solitary beech.

XXVII.

Clear space spreads round it for a rood or more;
Where o'er the space the feathering branches bend,
The dogs, wedg'd close, with jaws that drip with gore,
Growl o'er the carcase of the wolf they rend.
Shamed at their lord's rebuke, they leave the feast—
Scent the fresh foot-track of the idol priest;

XXVIII.

And, track by track, deep, deeper through the maze,
Slowly they go—the watchful earl behind.
Here the soft earth a recent hoof betrays;
And still a footstep near the hoof they find;—
So on, so on—the pathway spreads more large,
And daylight rushes on the forest marge.

XXIX.

The dogs bound emulous; but, snarling, shrink
Back at the anger of the earl's quick cry;—
Near a small water spring, had paused to drink
A man half clad, who now, with kindling eye,
And lifted knife, roused by the hostile sounds,
Plants his firm foot, and fronts the glaring hounds.

XXX.

"Fear not, rude stranger," quoth the earl in scorn;
"Not thee I seek; my dogs chace nobler prey.
Speak, thou hast seen (if wandering here since morn)
A lonely horseman;—whither wends his way?"
"Track'st thou his steps in love or hate?"—"Why, so
As hawk its quarry, or as man his foe."

XXXI.

"Thou dost not serve his God," the heathen said;
And sullen turn'd to quench his thirst again.
The fierce earl chafed, but longer not delay'd;
For what he sought the earth itself made plain
In the clear hoof-prints; to the hounds he showed
The clue, and, cheering as they track'd, he rode.

XXXII.

But thrice, to guide his comrades from the maze,
Rings through the echoing wood his lusty horn.
Now o'er waste pastures where the wild bulls graze,
Now labouring up slow-lengthening headlands borne,
The steadfast hounds outstrip the horseman's flight,
And on the hill's dim summit fade from sight.

XXXIII.

But scarcely fade, before, though faint and far,
Fierce wrathful yells the foe at bay reveal.
On spurs the Saxon, till, like some pale star,
Gleams on the hill a lance—a helm of steel.
The brow is gained; a space of level land,
Bare to the sun—a grove at either hand;

XXXIV.

And in the middle of the space a mound;
And, on the mound a knight upon his barb.
No need for herald there his tromp to sound!—
No need for diadem and ermine garb!
Nature herself has crown'd that lion mien;
And in the man the king of men is seen.

XXXV.

Upon his helmet sits a snow-white dove,
Its plumage blending with the plumëd crest.
Below the mount, recoiling, circling, move
The ban-dogs, awed by the majestic rest
Of the great foe; and, yet with fangs that grin,
And eyes that redden, raves the madding din.

XXXVI.

Still stands the steed; still, shining in the sun,
Sits on the steed the rider, statue-like:
One stately hand upon his haunch, while one
Lifts the tall lance, disdainful ev'n to strike;
Calm from the roar obscene looks forth his gaze,
Calm as the moon at which the watch-dog bays.

XXXVII.

The Saxon rein'd his war-horse on the brow
Of the broad hill; and if his inmost heart
Ever confest to fear, fear touched it now;—
Not that chill pang which strife and death impart
To meaner men, but such religious awe
As from brave souls a foe admired can draw:

XXXVIII.

Behind a quick and anxious glance he threw,
And pleased beheld spur midway up the hill
His knights and squires; again his horn he blew,
Then hush'd the hounds, and neared the slope where still
The might of Arthur rested, as in cloud
Rests thunder; there his haughty crest he bowed,

XXXIX.

And lowered his lance, and said—"Dread foe and lord,
Pardon the Saxon Harold, nor disdain
To yield to warrior hand a kingly sword.
Behold my numbers! to resist were vain,
And flight——" Said Arthur, "Saxon, is a word
From warrior lips a king should not have heard;

XL.

"And, sooth to say, when Cymri's knights shall ride
To chace a Saxon monarch from the plain,
More knightly sport shall Cymri's king provide,
And Cymrian tromps shall ring a nobler strain.
Warrior, forsooth! when first went warrior, say,
With hound and horn—God's image for the prey?"

XLI.

Gall'd to the quick, the fiery earl erect
Rose in his stirrups, shook his iron hand,
And cried—"ALFADER! but for the respect
Arm'd numbers owe to one, my Saxon brand
Should——but why words? Ho, Mercia to the field!
Lance to the rest!—yield, scornful Cymrian, yield!"

XLII.

For answer, Arthur closed his bassinet.
Then down it broke, the thunder from that cloud!
And, ev'n as thunder by the thunder met,
O'er his spurr'd steed broad-breasted Harold bow'd;
Swift through the air the rushing armour flash'd,
And tempests in the shock commingling clash'd!

XLIII.

The Cymrian's lance smote on the Mercian's breast,
Through the pierc'd shield,—there, shivering in the hand.
The dove had stirr'd not on the Prince's crest,
And on his destrier bore him to the band,
Which, moving not, but in a steadfast ring,
With levell'd lances front the coming King.

XLIV.

His shivered lance thrown by, high o'er his head,
Pluck'd from the selle, his battle-axe he shook—
Paused for an instant—breathed his foaming steed,
And chose his pathway with one lightning look:
On either side, behind the Saxon foes,
Cimmmerian woods with welcome gloom arose;

XLV.

These gain'd, to conflict numbers less avail.
He paused, and every voice cried—"Yield, brave King!"
Scarce died the word ere through the wall of steel
Flashes the breach, and backward reels the ring,
Plumes shorn, shields cloven, man and horse o'erthrown,
As the arm'd meteor flames and rushes on.

XLVI.

Till then, the danger shared, upon his crest,
Unmoved and calm, had sate the faithful dove,
Serene as, braved for some beloved breast,
All peril finds the gentle hero,—Love;
But rising now, towards the dexter side
Where darkest droop the woods, the pinions guide.

XLVII.

Near the green marge the Cymrian checks the rein,
And, ev'n forgetful of the dove, wheels round,
To front the foe that follows up the plain:
So when the lion, with a single bound,
Breaks through Numidian spears,—he halts before
His den,—and roots dread feet that fly no more.

XLVIII.

Their riven ranks reform'd, the Saxons move
In curving crescent, close, compact, and slow
Behind the earl; who feels a hero's love
Fill his large heart for that great hero foe;
Murmuring "May Harold, thus confronting all,
Pass from the spear-storm to The Golden Hall!"*

XLIX.

Then to his band—"If prophecy and sign
Paling men's cheeks, and read by wizard seers,
Had not declared that Odin's threatened line,
And the large birthright of the Saxon spears,
Were cross'd by SKULDA,† in the baleful skein
Of him who dares 'The Choosers of the Slain,'‡

L.

"If not forbid against his single arm
Singly to try the even-sworded strife,
Since his new gods, or Merlin's mighty charm,
Hath made a host, the were-geld of his life—
Not ours this shame!—here one, and there a field,
But men are waxen when the Fates are steel'd.

* Walhalla. † SKULDA, the Norna, or Destiny, of the Future.
‡ The Valkyrs, the Choosers of the Slain, who ride before the battle, and select its victims; to whom, afterwards, (softening their character) they administer in Walhalla.

LI.

"Seize we our captive, so the gods command—
But ye are men, let manhood guide the blow;
Spare life, or but with life-defending hand
Strike—and Walhalla take that noble foe!
Sound trump, speed truce."——Sedately from the rest
Rode out the earl, and Cymri thus addrest:—

LII.

"Our steels have cross'd: hate shivers on the shield;
If the speech gall'd, the lance atones the word:
Yield, for thy valour wins the right to yield;
Unstain'd the scutcheon, though resign'd the sword.
Grant us the grace, which chance (not arms) hath won:
Why strike the many who would save the one?"

LIII.

"Fair foe, and courteous," answered Arthur, moved
By that chivalric speech, "too well the might
Of Mercia's famous Harold have I proved,
To deem it shame to yield as knight to knight;
But a king's sword is by a nation given,
Who guards a people holds his post from heaven.

LIV.

"This freedom which thou ask'st me to resign
Than life is dearer; were it but to show
That with my people thinks their King!—divine
Through me all Cymri!—Streams shall cease to flow,
Yon sun to shine, before to Saxon strife
One Cymrian yields his freedom save with life.

LV.

"And so the saints assoil ye of my blood;
Return;—the rest we leave unto our cause
And the just heavens!" All silent, Harold stood
And his heart smote him. Now, amidst that pause,
Arthur look'd up, and in the calm above
Behold a falcon wheeling round the dove!

LVI.

For thus it chanced; the bird which Harold bore
(As was the Saxon wont) whate'er his way,
Had, in the woodland, slipp'd the hood it wore,
Unmark'd; and, when the bloodhounds bark'd at bay,
Lured by the sound, had risen on the wing,
Over the conflict vaguely hovering—

LVII.

Till when the dove had left, to guide, her lord,
It caught the white plumes glancing where they went;
High in large circles to its height it soared,
Swoop'd;—the light pinion foil'd the fierce descent;
The falcon rose rebounding to the prey;
And clos'd escape—confronting still the way.

LVIII.

In vain the dove to Arthur seeks to flee;
Round her and round, with every sweep more near,
The swift destroyer circles rapidly,
Fixing keen eyes that fascinate with fear,
A moment—and a shaft, than wing more fleet,
Hurls the pierced falcon at the Saxon's feet.

LIX.

Down, heavily it fell;—a moment stirr'd
Its fluttering plumes, and roll'd its glazing eye;
But ev'n before the breath forsook the bird,
Ev'n while the arrow whistled through the sky,
Rush'd from the grove which screen'd the marksman's hand,
With yell and whoop, a wild barbarian band—

LX.

Half clad, with hides of beast, and shields of horn,
And huge clubs cloven from the knotted pine;
And spears like those by Thor's great children borne,
When Cæsar bridg'd with marching * steel the Rhine,
Countless they start, as if from every tree
Had sprung the uncouth defending deity;

LXI.

They pass the King, low bending as they pass;
Bear back the startled Harold on their way;
And roaring onward, mass succeeding mass,
Snatch the hemm'd Saxons from the King's survey.
On Arthur's crest the dove refolds its wing;
On Arthur's ear a voice comes murmuring,

LXII.

"Man, have I served thy God?" and Arthur saw
The priest beside him, leaning on his bow;
"Not till, in all, thou hast fulfill'd the law—
Thou hast saved the friend—now, aid to shield the foe;"
And as a ship, cleaving the severed tides,
Right through the sea of spears the hero rides.

* PLUT: *in vit. Cæs:*—CÆS: COMMENT. *lib.* iv.

LXIII.

The wild troop part submissive as he goes;
Where, like an islet in that stormy main,
Gleam'd Mercia's steel; and like a rock arose,
Breasting the breakers, the undaunted Thane;
He doff'd his helmet, look'd majestic round;
And dropp'd the murderous weapon on the ground;

LXIV.

And with a meek and brotherly embrace
Twined round the Saxon's neck the peaceful arm.
Strife stood arrested—the mild kingly face,
The loving gesture, like a holy charm,
Thrill'd thro' the ranks: you might have heard a breath!
So did soft Silence seem to bury Death.

LXV.

On the fair locks, and on the noble brow,
Fell the full splendour of the heavenly ray;
The dove, dislodged, flew up—and rested now,
Poised in the tranquil and translucent day.
The calm wings seem'd to canopy the head;
And from each plume a parting glory spread.

LXVI.

So leave we that still picture on the eye;
And turn, reluctant, where the wand of Song
Points to the walls of Time's long gallery:
And the dim Beautiful of Eld—too long
Mouldering unheeded in these later days,
Starts from the canvass, bright'ning as we gaze.

LXVII.

O lovely scene which smiles upon my view,
As sure it smiled on sweet Albano's dreams;
He to whom Amor gave the roseate hue
And that harmonious colour-wand which seems
Pluck'd from the god's own wing!—Arcades and bowers,
Mellifluous waters, lapsing amidst flowers,

LXVIII.

Or springing up, in multiform disport,
From murmurous founts, delightedly at play;
As if the Naiad held her joyous court
To greet the goddess whom the flowers obey;
And all her nymphs took varying shapes in glee,
Bell'd like the blossom—branching like the tree.

LXIX.

Adown the cedarn alleys glanced the wings
Of all the painted populace of air,
Whatever lulls the noonday while it sings
Or mocks the iris with its plumes,—is there—
Music and air so interfus'd and blent,
That music seems life's breathing element.

LXX.

And every alley's stately vista closed
With some fair statue, on whose gleaming base
Beauty, not earth's, benignantly reposed,
As if the gods were native to the place;
And fair indeed the mortal forms, I ween,
Whose presence brings no discord to the scene!

LXXI.

O fair they are, if mortal forms they be!
Mine eye the lovely error must beguile;
So bloom'd the Hours, when from the heaving sea*
Came Aphrodité to the rosy isle,
What time they left Olympian halls above,
To greet on earth their best beguiler—Love?

LXXII.

Are they the Oreads from the Delphian steep
Waiting their goddess of the silver bow?
Or shy Napææ,† startled from their sleep,
Where blue Cithæron guards sweet vales below,
Watching as home, from vanquish'd Ind afar,
Comes their loved Evian in the panther-car?

LXXIII.

Why stream ye thus from yonder arching bowers?
Whom wait, whom watch ye for, O lovely band?
With spears that, thyrsus-like, glance, wreath'd with flowers,
And garland-fetters, linking hand to hand,
And locks, from which drop blossoms on your way,
Like starry buds from the loose crown of May?

LXXIV.

Behold how Alp on Alp shuts out the scene
From all the ruder world that lies afar;
Deep, fathom-deep, the valley which they screen,
Deep, as in chasms of cloud a happy star!
What pass admits the stranger to your land?
Whom wait, whom watch ye for, O lovely band?

* HOM. HYMN.

† NAPÆÆ, the most bashful of all the rural nymphs; their rare apparition was supposed to produce delirium in the beholder.

LXXV.

Ages ago, what time the barbarous horde,
From whose rough bosoms sprang Imperial Rome,
Drew the slow-widening circle of the sword
Till kingdoms vanish'd in a robber's home,
A wise Etrurian chief, forewarn'd ('t was said)
By his dark Cære,(1) from the danger fled:

LXXVI.

He left the vines of fruitful Fiesolè,
Left, with his household gods and chosen clan,
Intent beyond the Ausonian bounds to flee,
And Rome's dark shadow on the world of man.
So came the exiles to the rocky wall
Which, centuries after, frown'd on Hannibal.

LXXVII.

Here, it so chanced, that down the deep profound
Of some huge Alp—a stray'd Etrurian fell;
The pious rites ordained to explore the ground,
And give the ashes to the funeral cell;
Slowly they gained the gulf, to scare away
A vulture ravening on the mangled clay;

LXXVIII.

Smit by a javelin from the leader's hand,
The bird crept fluttering down a deep defile,
Through whose far end faint glimpses of a land,
Sunn'd by a softer daylight, sent a smile;
The Augur hail'd an omen in the sight,
And led the wanderers towards the glimmering light.

LXXIX.

What seem'd a gorge was but a vista'd cave,
Long-drawn and hollow'd through primæval stone;
Rude was the path, but as, beyond the grave
Elysium shines, the glorious landscape shone,
Broadening and brightening—till their wonder sees
Bloom through the Alps the lost Hesperides.

LXXX.

There, the sweet sunlight, from the heights debarr'd,
Gathered its pomp to lavish on the vale;
A wealth of wild sweets glittered on the sward,
Screen'd by the very snow-rocks from the gale;
Murmured clear waters, murmured joyous birds,
And o'er soft pastures roved the fearless herds.

LXXXI.

His rod the Augur waves above the ground,
And cries, "In Tina's name I bless the soil."(2)
With veilëd brows the exiles circle round;
Along the rod propitious lightnings coil;
The gods approve; rejoicing hands combine,
Swift springs a sylvan city from the pine.

LXXXII.

What charm yet fails them in the lovely place?
Childhood's gay laugh—and woman's tender smile.
A chosen few the venturous steps retrace;
Love lightens toil for those who rest the while;
And, ere the winter stills the sadden'd bird,
The sweeter music of glad homes is heard;

LXXXIII.

And, with the objects of the dearer care,
The parting gifts of the old soil are borne,
Soon Tusca's grape hangs flushing in the air,
And the glebe ripples with the golden corn;
Gleams on grey slopes the olive's silvery tree,
In her lone Alpine child,—far Fiesolè

LXXXIV.

Revives—reblooms, but under happier stars!
Age rolls on age,—upon the antique world
Full many a storm hath graved its thunder scars;
Tombs only speak the Etrurian's language;*—hurl'd
To dust the shrines of Naith;†—the serpents hiss
On Asia's throne in lorn Persepolis;

LXXXV.

The seaweed rots upon the ports of Tyre;
On Delphi's steep the Pythian's voice is dumb;
Sad Athens leans upon her broken lyre;
From the doom'd East the Bethlem Star hath come;
But Rome an empire from an empire's loss
Gains in the god Rome yielded to the Cross!

LXXXVI.

And here, as in a crypt, the miser, Time,
Hoards, from all else, embedded in the stone,
One eldest treasure—fresh as when, sublime
O'er gods and men, Jove thundered from his throne.
The garb, the arts, the creed, the tongue, the same
As when to Tarquin Cuma's sibyl came.

* The Etrurian language perished between the age of Augustus and that of Julian.—LEITCH'S *Muller on Ancient Art.*

† NAITH, the Egyptian goddess.

LXXXVII.

The soil's first fathers, with elaborate hands,
Had closed the rocky portals of the place;
No egress opens to unhappier lands:
As tree on tree, so race succeeds to race,
From sleep the passions no temptations draw,
And strife bows childlike to the patriarch's law;

LXXXVIII.

Lull'd was Ambition; each soft lot was cast;
Gold had no use; with war expired renown;
From priest to priest mysterious reverence past;
From king to king the mild Saturnian crown:
Like dews, the rest came harmless into birth;
Like dews exhaling—after glad'ning earth.

LXXXIX.

Not wholly dead, indeed, the love of praise—
When can that warmth from heaven forsake the heart?
The Hister's* lyre still thrill'd with Camsee's lays,
Still urn and statue caught the Arretian art,
And hands, least skill'd, found leisure still to cull
Some flowers, in offering to the Beautiful.

XC.

Hence, the whole vale one garden of delight;
Hence every home a temple for the Grace;
Who worships Nature finds in Art the rite;
And Beauty grows the Genius of the Place.
Enough this record of the happy land:
Whom watch, whom wait ye for, O lovely band?

* HISTER, the Etruscan minstrel.—CAMSEE, CAMESE, or CAMŒSE, the mythological sister of Janus (a national deity of the Etrurians) whose art of song is supposed to identify her with the Camœna or muse of the Latin poets.—ARRETIUM, celebrated for the material of the Etruscan vases.

XCI.

Listen awhile!—The strength of that soft state,
The arch's key-stones, are the priest and king;
To guard all power inviolate from debate,
To curb all impulse, or direct its wing,
In antique forms to mould from childhood all;—
This guards more strongly than the Alpine wall.

XCII.

The regal chief might wed as choice inclined,
Not so the daughters sprung from his embrace,
Law, strong as caste, their nuptial rite confined
To the pure circle of the Lartian race;
Hence with more awe the kingly house was viewed,
Hence nipp'd ambition bore no rival feud.

XCIII.

But now, as on some eldest oak, decay
In the proud topmost boughs is serely shown;
While life yet shoots from every humbler spray—
So, of the royal tribe, one branch alone
Remains; and all the honours of the race
Lend their last bloom to smile in Ægle's face.(3)

XCIV.

The great arch-priest (to whom the laws assign
The charge of this sweet blossom from the bud),
Consults the annals archived in the shrine,
And, twice before, when fail'd the Lartian blood,
And no male heir was found, the guiding page
Records the expedient of the elder age.

XCV.

Rather than yield to rival tribes the hope
That wakes aspiring thought and tempts to strife;
And (lowering awful reverence) rashly ope
The pales that mark the set degrees of life,
The priest (to whom the secret only known)
Unlock'd the artful portals of the stone;

XCVI.

And watch'd and lured some wanderer, o'er the steep,
Into the vale, return for ever o'er;
The gate, like Death's, reclosed upon the keep—
Earth left its ghost as on the Funeral shore.
And what more envied lot could earth provide
Than calm Elysium—with a living bride?

XCVII.

A priestly tale the simple flock deceived:
The gods had care of their Tagetian child![4]
The nuptial garlands for a god they weaved;
A god himself upon the maid had smiled,
A god himself renewed the race divine,
And gave new monarchs to the Lartian line.

XCVIII.

Yet short, alas, the incense of delight
That lull'd the new-found Ammon of the Hour;
Like love's own star, upon the verge of night,
Trembled the torch that lit the bridal bower;
Soon as a son was born—his mission o'er—
The stranger vanish'd to his gods once more.

XCIX.

Two temples closed the boundaries of the place,
One (vow'd to Tina) in its walls conceal'd
The granite-portals, by the former race
So deftly fashion'd,—not a chink reveal'd
Where (twice unbarr'd in all the ages flown)
The stony donjon mask'd the door of stone.

C.

The fane of Mantu* form'd the opposing bound
Of the long valley; where the surplus wave
Of the main stream a gloomy outlet found,
Split on sharp rocks beneath a night of cave,
And there, in torrents, down some lost ravine
Where Alps took root—fell heard but never seen.

CI.

Right o'er this cave the Death-Power's temple rose;
The cave's dark vault was curtain'd by the shrine;
Here by the priest (the sacred scrolls depose)
Was led the bridegroom when renewed the line;
At night, that shrine his steps unprescient trod—
And morning came, and earth had lost the god!

CII.

Nine days had now the Augur to the flock
Announced the coming of the heavenly spouse;
Nine days his steps had wandered through the rock,
And his eye watch'd through unfamiliar boughs,
And not a foot-fall in those rugged ways!
The lone Alps wearied on his lonely gaze—

* Mantu, or Mandu, the Etrurian God of the Shades.

CIII.

But now this day (the tenth) the signal torch
Streams from the temple; the mysterious swell
Of long-drawn music peals from aisle to porch:—
He leaves the bright hall where the Æsars * dwell,
He comes, o'er flowers and fountains to preside,
He comes, the god-spouse to the mortal bride—

CIV.

He comes, for whom ye watch'd, O lovely band,
Scatter your flowers before his welcome feet!
Lo, where the temple's holy gates expand,
Haste, O ye nymphs, the bright'ning steps to meet!
Why start ye back?—What though the blaze of steel
The form of Mars, the expanding gates reveal—

CV.

The face, no helmet crowns with war, displays
Not that fierce god from whom Etruria fled;
Cull from far softer legends while ye gaze,
Not there the aspect mortal maid should dread!
Have ye no songs from kindred Castaly
Of that bright wanderer from the Olympian† sky,

CVI.

When in Arcadian dells his silver lute
Hush'd in delight the nymph and breathless faun?
Or are your cold Etrurian minstrels mute
Of him whom Syria worshipp'd as the Dawn
And Greece as fair Adonis? Hail, O hail!
Scatter your flowers, and welcome to the vale!

* ÆSARS, the name given *collectively* to the Etrurian deities. SUET. AUG. 97. DIO. CASS. xxvi. p. 589.

† Apollo.

CVII.

Wondering the stranger moves! That fairy land,
Those forms of dark yet lustrous loveliness,(5)
That solemn seer, who leads him by the hand;
The tongue unknown, the joy he cannot guess,
Blend in one marvel every sound and sight;
And in the strangeness doubles the delight.

CVIII.

Young Ægle sits within her palace bower,
She hears the cymbals clashing from afar—
So Ormuzd's music welcomed in the hour
When the sun hastened to his morning-star.
Smile, Star of Morn—he cometh from above!
And twilight melts around the steps of Love.

CIX.

Save the grey Augur (since the unconscious child
Sprang to the last kiss of her dying sire)
Those eyes by man's rude presence undefil'd,
Had deepened into woman's. As a lyre
Hung on unwitnessed boughs, amidst the shade,
And but to air her soul its music made.

CX.

Fair was her prison, walled with woven flowers,
In a soft isle embraced by softest waters,
Linnet and lark the sentries to the towers,
And for the guard Etruria's infant daughters;
But stronger far than walls, the antique law,
And more than hosts, religion's shadowy awe.

CXI.

Thus lone, thus reverenced, the young virgin grew
Into the age, when on the heart's calm wave
The light winds tremble, and emotions new
Steal to the peace departing childhood gave;
When for the vague Beyond, the captive pines,
And the soul misses—what it scarce divines.

CXII.

Lo where she sits—(and blossoms arch the dome)
Girt by young handmaids!—Near and nearer swelling
The cymbals sound before the steps that come
O'er rose and hyacinth to the bridal dwelling;
And clear and loud the summer air along
From virgin voices floats the choral song.

CXIII.

Lo where the sacred talismans diffuse
Their fragrant charms against the Evil Powers;
Lo where young hands the consecrated dews
From cuspëd vervain sprinkle round the flowers,
And o'er the robe with broidered palm-leaves sown,
That decks the daughter of the peaceful throne!

CXIV.

Lo, on those locks of night the myrtle crown!
Lo where the heart beats quick beneath the veil;
Lo where the lids, cast tremulously down,
Cloud stars which Eros as his own might hail;
Oh lovelier than Endymion's loveliest dream,
Joy to the heart on which those eyes shall beam!

CXV.

The bark comes bounding to the islet shore,
The trelliced gates fly back; the footsteps fall
Through jasmined galleries on the threshold floor;
And, in the Heart-Enchainer's golden thrall,
There, spell-bound halt;—So, first since youth began
Her eyes meet youth in the charm'd eyes of man!

CXVI.

And there Art's two opposed Ideals rest;
There the twin flowers of the old world bloom forth;
The classic symbol of the gentle West,
And the bold type of the chivalric North.
What trial waits thee, Cymrian, sharper here
Than the wolf's death-fang or the Saxon's spear?

CXVII.

But would ye learn how he we left afar,
Girt by the stormy people of the wild,
Came to the confines of the Hesperus Star,
And the soft gardens of the Etrurian child;
Would ye, yet lingering in the wondrous vale,
Learn what time spares if sorrow can assail;

CXVIII.

What there, forgetful of the vanish'd dove,
(Lost at those portals) did the King befall;
Pause till the hand has tuned the harp to love,
And notes that bring young listeners to the hall;
And he, whose sires in Cymri reign'd, shall sing
How Tusca's daughter loved the Cymrian King.

NOTES TO BOOK III.

[1] "*A wise Etrurian chief, forewarned ('twas said)*
By his dark Cære, from the danger fled."

Page 94, stanza lxxv.

Cære, one of the twelve cities in the Etrurian league (though not originally an Etrurian population), imparted to the Romans their sacred mysteries: hence the word Cæremonia. This holy city was in close connection with Delphi. An interesting account of it, under its earlier name "Agylla," will be found in Sir W. Gell's "Topography of Rome and its vicinity." The obscure passage in Plutarch's Life of Sylla, which intimates that the Etrurian soothsayers had a forewarning of the declining fates of their country, is well known to scholars; who have made more of it than it deserves.

I may as well observe that the adjective *Lartian* is derived from *Lars* (or lord), in contradistinction to the adjective *Larian*, derived from *Lar* (or household god).

[2] "*His rod the Augur waves above the ground,*
And cries 'In Tina's name I bless the soil!'"

Page 95, stanza lxxxi.

Tina was the Jove of the Etrurians. The mode in which this people (whose mysterious civilization so tasks our fancy and so escapes from our researches) appropriated a colony is briefly described in the text. The Augur made lines in the air due north, south, east, and west, marked where the lines crossed upon the earth; then he and the chiefs associated with him sate down, covered their heads, and waited some approving omen from the gods. The Etrurian Augurs were celebrated for their power over the electric fluid. The

vulture was a popular bird of omen in the founding of colonies. See NIEBUHR, MÜLLER, &c.

[3] "——— *And all the honours of the race*
Lend their last bloom to smile on Ægle's face."
Page 98, stanza xciii.

The Etrurians paid more respect to women than most of the classical nations, and admitted females to the throne. The Augur (a purely Etruscan name and office) was the highest power in the state. In the earlier Etruscan history the Augur and the king were unquestionably united in one person. Latterly, this does not appear to have been necessarily (nor perhaps generally) the case. The king (whether we call him lars or lucumo), as well as the augur, was elected out of a certain tribe, or clan; but in the strange colony described in the poem, it is supposed that the rank has become hereditary in the family of the chief who headed it, as would probably have been the case even in more common-place settlements in another soil. Thus, the first Etrurian colonist, Tarchun, no doubt had his successors in his own lineage.

I cannot assert that Ægle is a purely Etruscan name; it is one common both with the Greeks and Latins. In Apollodorus (ii. 5) it is given to one of the Hesperides, and in Virgil (Eclog. vi. l. 20) to the fairest of the Naiads, the daughter of the Sun; but it is not contrary to the conformation of the Etruscan language, as, by the way, many of the most popular Latinized Etruscan words are, such as *Lucumo*, for Lauchme; and even Porsena, or, as Virgil (contrary to other authorities) spells and pronounces it, Porsenna (a name which has revived to fresh fame in Mr. Macaulay's noble "Lays") is a sad corruption; for, as both Niebuhr and Sir William Gl remark, the Etruscans had no *o* in their language. Pliny informs us that they supplied its place by the *v*. I apprehend that an Etrurian would have spelt Porsena *Pvrsna*.*

* Dryden, with an accurate delicacy of erudition for which one might scarcely give him credit, does not in his translation follow Virgil's quantity, Porsēnna, but makes the word short, Porsena.

" *The Gods had care of their Tagetian child.*"

Page 99, stanza xcvii.

TAGES—the tutelary genius of the Etrurians. They had a noble legend that Tages appeared to Tarchun, rising from a furrow beneath his plough, with a man's head and a child's body; sung the laws destined to regulate the Etrurian colonist, then sunk, and expired. In Ovid's Metamorphoses (xvi. 533) Tages is said to have first taught the Etrurians to foretell the future.

" *Those forms of dark yet lustrous loveliness.*"

Page 102, stanza cvii.

Whatever the original cradle of the mysterious Etrurians, scholars, with one or two illustrious exceptions, are pretty well agreed that it must have been *somewhere* in the East; and the more familiar we become with the remains of their art, the stronger appears the evidence of their early and intimate connection with the Ægyptians, though in themselves a race decidedly not Ægyptian. See MICALI, *Stor. deg. Antich. Pop.* But in referring to this delightful and learned writer, to whom I am under many obligations, in this part of my poem, I must own, with such frankness as respect for so great an authority will permit, that I think many of his assumptions are to be taken with great qualification and reserve.

KING ARTHUR.

BOOK IV.

ARGUMENT.

Invocation to Love—Arthur, Ægle, and the Augur—Dialogue between the Cymrian and the Etrurian—Meanwhile Lancelot gains the sea-shore, where he meets with the Aleman-priest and his sons, and hears tidings of Arthur—He tells them the tale of his own infancy—Crosses the sea—Lands on the coast of Brettannie—And is guided by the chrystal ring in quest of Arthur towards the Alps—He finds the King's charger, which Arthur had left without the vaulted passage into the Happy Valley—But the rock-gate being closed, he cannot discover the King, and, winding by the foot of the Alps round the valley, gains a lake and a convent—The story now returns to Arthur and Ægle—Descriptive stanzas—A raven brings Arthur news from Merlin—The King resolves to quit the valley—He seeks and finds the Augur—Dialogue—Parting scene with Ægle—Arthur follows the Augur towards the fane of the funereal god.

BOOK IV.

I.

Hail, thou, the ever young, albeit of Night,
And of primæval Chaos eldest born;
Thou, at whose birth broke forth the Founts of Light,
And o'er Creation flush'd the earliest Morn!
Life, in thy life, suffused the conscious whole;
And formless matter took the harmonious soul.

II.

Hail, Love! the Death-defyer! age to age
Linking, with flowers, in the still heart of man!
Dream to the bard, and marvel to the sage,
Glory and mystery since the world began.
Shadowing the cradle, bright'ning at the tomb,
Soft as our joys, and solemn as our doom!

III.

Ghostlike amidst the unfamiliar Past,
Dim shadows flit along the streams of Time;
Vainly our learning trifles with the vast
Unknown of ages!—Like the wizard's rhyme
We call the dead, and from the Tartarus
'Tis but the dead that rise to answer us!

IV.

Voiceless and wan, we question them in vain;
They leave unsolv'd earth's mighty yesterday.
But wave thy wand—they bloom, they breathe again!
The link is found!—as *we* love, so loved *they!*
Warm to our clasp our human brothers start,
Man smiles on man, and heart speaks out to heart.

V.

Arch Power, of every power most dread, most sweet,
Ope at thy touch the far celestial gates;
Yet Terror flies with Joy before thy feet,
And, with the Graces, glide unseen the Fates.
Eos and Hesperus; one, with twofold light,
Bringer of day, and herald of the night.

VI.

But, lo! again, where rise upon the gaze
The Tuscan Virgin in the Alpine bower,
The steel-clad wanderer, in his rapt amaze,
Led thro' the flowerets to that living flower:
Eye meeting eye, as in that blest survey
Two hearts, unspeaking, breathe themselves away!

VII.

Calm on the twain reposed the Augur's eye,
A marble stillness on his solemn face;
Like some cold image of Necessity
When fated hands lay garlands on its base.
And slanted sunbeams, thro' the blossoms stealing,
Lit circled Childhood round the Virgin kneeling.

VIII.

Slow from charm'd wonder woke at last the King,
Well the mild grace became the lordly mien,
As, gently passing through the kneeling ring,
The warrior knelt with Childhood to the queen;
And on the hand, that thrill'd in his to be,
Press'd the pure kiss of courteous chivalry;

IX.

In the bold music of his mountain tongue,
Speaking the homage of his frank delight.
Is there one common language to the young
That, with each word more troubled and more bright,
Stirr'd the quick blush—as when the south wind heaves
Into sweet storm the hush of rosy leaves?—

X.

But now the listening Augur to the side
Of Arthur moves; and, signing silently,
The handmaid children from the chamber glide,
And Ægle followeth slow, with drooping eye.—
Then on the King the soothsayer gazed and spoke,
And Arthur started as the accents broke;—

XI.

For those dim sounds his mother-tongue express,
But in some dialect of remotest age;
Like that in which the far SARONIDES*
Exchang'd dark riddles with the Samian sage.(1)
Ghostlike the sounds; a founder of his race
Seem'd in that voice the haunter of the place.

* SARONIDES—the Druids of Gaul: "The Samian Sage"—PYTHAGORAS. The Augur is here supposed to speak Phœnician as the parent language of Arthur's native Celtic. See Note 1.

XII.

"Guest," said the priest, with labour'd words and slow,
"If, as thy language, tho' corrupt, betrays,
Thou art of those great tribes our records show
As the crown'd wanderers of untrodden ways,
Whose eldest god, from pole to pole enshrin'd,
Gives Greece her KRONOS and her BOUDH to Ind;

XIII.

"Who, from their Syrian parent-stem, spread forth
Their giant roots to every farthest shore,
Sires of young nations in the stormy North,
And slumberous East; but most renown'd of yore
In purple Tyre;—if, of PHŒNICIAN race,
In truth thou art,—thrice welcome to the place!

XIV.

"Know us as sons of that old friendly soil
Whose ports, perchance, yet glitter with the prows
Of Punic ships, when resting from their toil
In LUNA'S * gulf, the seabeat crews carouse.
Unless in sooth (and here he sigh'd) the day
Cære foretold hath come to RASENA!"†

* Luna, a trading town on the gulf of Spezia, said to have been founded by the Etrurian Tarchun. See STRABO, lib. v. CAT. Orig. XXV. In a fragment of Ennius, Luna is mentioned. In Lucan's time it was deserted, "desertæ mœnia Lunæ."—LUC. i. 586.

† RASENA was the name which the Etrurians gave to themselves.—TWISS'S NIEBUHR, vol. i. c. vii. MULLER *die Etrüsker*: DION. i. 30.

XV.

"Grave sir," quoth Arthur, piteously perplext,
"Or much—forgive me, hath my hearing err'd,
Or of that People quoted in thy text,
(Perish'd long since)—but dimly have I heard:
Phœnicians! True, that name is found within
Our scrolls;—they came to MEL YNYS for tin!

XVI.

"As for my race, our later bards declare
It springs from Brut, the famous Knight of Troy;
But if Sir Hector spoke in Welch, I ne'er
Could clearly learn—meanwhile, I hear with joy,
My native language (pardon the remark)
Much as Nŏah spoke it when he left the ark.

XVII.

"More would my pleasure be increased to know
That that fair lady has your own precision
In the dear music which, so long ago,
We *taught*—observe, not *learn'd* from—the Phœnician."
"Speak as your fathers spoke the maiden can;
O many-vowell'd, ear-afflicting man!

XVIII.

The priest replied. "But, ere I yet disclose
The bliss that Northia* singles for your lot,
Fain would I learn what change the gods impose
On the old races and their sceptres?—what
The latest news from RASENA?"—"With shame
I own, grave sir, I never heard that name!"

XIX.

The Augur stood aghast!—"O, ruthless Fates!
Who then rules Italy?"—"The Ostrogoth."
"The Os——the what?"—"Except the Papal states;
Unless the Goth, indeed, has ravish'd both
The Cæsar's throne and the apostle's chair—
Spite of the knight of Thrace,—Sir Belisair."†

XX.

"What else the warrior nations of the earth?"
Groan'd the stunn'd Augur.—"Reverend sir, the Huns,
Franks, Vandals, Lombards—all have warlike worth;
Nor least, I trust, old Cymri's druid sons!"
"O, Northia, Northia! and the East?"—"In peace,
Under the Christian Emperor of Greece;

* NORTHIA, the Etrurian Deity, which corresponds with the FORTUNE of the Romans, but probably with something more of the sterner attributes which the Greek and the Scandinavian gave to the FATES. I cannot but observe here on the similarity in sound and signification between the Etrurian Northia and the Norna of the Scandinavians. Norna with the last is the general term applied to Fate. The Etrurian name for the deities collectively—ÆSARS, is not dissimilar to that given collectively to their deities by the Scandinavians—viz. ÆSIR, or ASAS.

† Belisarius, whose fame was then just rising under Justinian. The Ostrogoth, Theodoric, was on the throne of Italy.

XXI.

"Whose arms of late have scourged the Paynim race,
And worsted Satan!"—"Satan, who is he?"
Greatly the knight was shock'd, in that fair place,
To find such ignorance of the powers that be:
So then, from Eve and Serpent he began;
And sketch'd the history of the Foe of Man.

XXII.

"Ah," said the Augur—"here, I comprehend,
Ægypt, and Typhon, and the serpent creed![3]
So, o'er the East the gods of Greece extend,
And Isis totters?"—"Truly, and indeed,"
Sighed Arthur, scandalized—"I see, with pain,
You have much to learn my monks could best explain—

XXIII.

"Nathless for this, and all you seek to know
Which I, no clerk, though Christian, can relate,
Occasion meet my sojourn may bestow;—
Now, wherefore, pray you, through yon granite gate
Have you, with signs of some distress endured,
And succour sought, my wandering steps allured?"

XXIV.

"Pardon, but first, soul-startling stranger," said
The slow-recovering Augur—"say if fair
The region seems to which those steps were led?
And next, the maid to whom you knelt compare
With those you leave. Are hers, in sober truth,
The charms that fix the roving heart of youth?"

XXV.

"Lovelier than all on earth mine eyes have seen
Smiles the gay marvel of this gentle realm;
Of all earth's beauty that fair maid the queen;
And, might I place her glove upon my helm,
I would proclaim that truth with lance and shield,
In tilt and tourney, sole against a field!"

XXVI.

"Since that be so (though what such custom means
I rather guess than fully comprehend)
Answer again;—if right my reason gleans
From dismal harvests, and discerns the end
To which the Beautiful and Wise have come,
Hard are the fates beyond our Alpine home:

XXVII.

"What makes, without, the chief pursuit of life?"
"War," said the Cymrian, with a mournful sigh:
"The fierce provoke, the free resist, the strife,
The daring perish and the dastard fly;
Amidst a storm we snatch our troubled breath,
And life is one grim battle-field of death."

XXVIII.

"Then here, O stranger, find at last repose!
Here, never smites the thunder-blast of war:
Here all unknown the very name of foes;
Here, but with yielding earth men's contests are;
Our trophies—flower and olive, corn and wine:—
Accept a sceptre, be this kingdom thine!

XXIX.

"Our queen, the virgin who hath charm'd thine eyes—
Our laws her spouse, in whom the gods shall send,
Decree; the gods have sent thee;—what the skies
Allot, receive:—Here, shall thy wanderings end,
Here thy woes cease, and life's voluptuous day
Glide, like yon river through our flowers, away."

XXX.

"Kind sir," said Arthur, gratefully—"such lot
Indeed were fair beyond what dreams display;
But earth has duties which——"—"Relate them not!"
Exclaimed the Augur—"or at least delay,
Till better known the kingdom and the bride,
Then youth, and sense, and nature, shall decide."

XXXI.

With that, the Augur, much too wise as yet
To hint compulsion, and secure from flight,
Arose, resolved each scruple to beset
With all which melteth duty in delight—
Here, for awhile, we leave the tempted King,
And turn to him who owns the chrystal ring.

XXXII.

Oh, the old time's divine and fresh romance!
When o'er the lone yet ever-haunted ways
Went frank-eyed Knighthood with the lifted lance,
And life with wonder charm'd adventurous days!
When light more rich, through prisms that dimm'd it, shone;
And Nature loom'd more large through the Unknown.

XXXIII.

Nature, not then the slave of formal law!
Her each free sport a miracle might be;
Enchantment clothed the forest with sweet awe;
Astolfo* spoke from out the Bleeding Tree;
The Fairy wreath'd his dance in moonlit air;
On golden sands the Mermaid sleek'd her hair—

XXXIV.

Then soul learn'd more than barren sense can teach
(Soul with the sense now evermore at strife)
Wherever fancy wandered man could reach—
And what is now called poetry was life.
If the old beauty from the world is fled,
Is it that Truth or that Belief is dead?

XXXV.

Not following, step by step, the devious King,
But whither best his later steps are gained,
Moved the sure index of the fairy ring,
And since, at least, a moon hath wax'd and waned
What time the pilgrim left the fatherland—
So towards his fresher footsteps veered the hand.

XXXVI.

Lo, now where pure Sabrina† on her breast
Hushes sweet Isca, and, like some fair nun
That yearns, earth-wearied, for the golden rest,
Sees with delighted calm her journey done;
And broader, brighter, as she nears her grave,
Melts in the deep;—all daylight on the wave.

* ARIOSTO, canto vi.

† SABRINA, the Severn; whose legendary tale Milton has so exquisitely told in the Comus.—ISCA, the Usk.

XXXVII.

Across that stream pass'd sprightly Lancelot,
Then, towards those lovely lands which yet retain
The Cymrian freedom, rode, and rested not
Till, loud on Devon, broke the rough'ning main.
Through rocks abrupt, the strong waves force their way,
Here cleave the land—there, hew the indented bay.

XXXVIII.

The horseman paused. Rude huts lay far and wide;
The dipping sea-gulls wheel'd with startled shrick;
Drawn on the sands lay coracles of hide,*
And all was desolate; when towards the creek,
Near which he halts, he hears the plashing oar;
A boat shoots in; the seamen leap to shore.

XXXIX.

Three were their number,—two in youthful prime,
One of mid years;—tall, huge of limb the three;
Scarce clad, with weapons of a northward clime;
Clubs, spears, and shields—the uncouth armoury
Of man, while yet the wild beast is his foe.
Yet something still the lords of earth may show;—

* The ancient British boats, covered with coria or hydes—"The ancient Britons," as Mr. Pennant observes, "had them of large size, and even made short voyages in them, according to the accounts we receive from Lucan."—*Pennant*, vol. i. p. 303.

XL.

The pride of eye, the majesty of mien,
The front erect that looks upon the star;
While round each neck the twisted chains are seen
Of Teuton chiefs;—(and signs of chiefs they are
In Cymrian lands—where still the torque of gold*
Or decks the highborn or rewards the bold).

XLI.

Stern Lancelot frown'd; for in those sturdy forms
The Christian Knight the Saxon foemen fear'd.
"Why come ye hither?—nor compelled by storms,
Nor proffering barter?" As he spoke they near'd
The noble knight;—and thus the elder said,
"Nought save his heart the Aleman hath led!

XLII.

"Ere more I answer, say if this the shore,
And thou the friend, of him who owns the dove?
Arthur the King,—who taught us to adore
By the man's deeds the God whose creed is love?"
Then Lancelot answered, with a moistening eye,
"Arthur's true knight and lealest friend am I."

XLIII.

With that, he leapt from selle to clasp his hand
Who spoke thus gently of the absent one:
And now behold them seated on the sand,
Frank faces smiling in the cordial sun;
The absent, there, seemed present; to unite
In loving bonds, his converts and his knight.

* The twisted chain, or collar, denoted the chiefs of all the old tribes, known as Gauls to the Romans. It is by this badge that the critics in art have rightly decided that the statue called "The Dying Gladiator" is in truth meant to personify a wounded Gaul. The collar, or torque, was long retained by the chiefs of Britain—and allusions to it are frequent in the songs of the Welch.

XLIV.

Then told the Aleman the tale by song
Already told—and we resume its flow
Where the mild hero charm'd the stormy throng
And twined the arm that sheltered round his foe:
Not meanly conquered but sublimely won—
Stern Harold vail'd his plume to Uther's son.

XLV.

The Saxon troop resought the Vandal king,
And Arthur sojourn'd with the savage race:
More easy such rude proselytes to bring
To Christian truth, than in the wonderous place
Where now he rests,—proud Wisdom he shall find!
For heaven dawns clearest on the simplest mind.

XLVI.

But when his cause of wrong the Cymrian showed;
The heathen foe—the carnage-crimson'd fields;
With one fierce impulse those fierce converts glow'd,
And their wild war-howl chimed with clashing shields
But Arthur wisely shunn'd that last appeal
Of falling states,—the stranger's fatal steel.

XLVII.

Yet to the chief (for there at least no fear)
And his two sons, a slow consent he gave:
Show'd by the prince the stars by which to steer,
They hew'd a pine and launched it on the wave;
Bringing rough forms but dauntless hearts to swell
The force that guards the fates of Carduel.

XLVIII.

The story heard, the son of royal BAN *
Questions the paths to which the King was led.
"Know," answered Faul (so hight the Aleman,)
"That, in our father's days, our warriors spread
O'er lands wherein eternal summer dwells,
Beyond the snow-storm's siegeless pinnacles;

XLIX.

"And on the borders of those lands, 'tis told,
There lies a lake, some dead great city's grave,
Where, when the moon is at her full, behold
Pillar and palace shine up from the wave!
And o'er the lake, seen but by gifted seers,
Its phantom bark a silent phantom steers.

L.

"It chanc'd, as round our fires we sate at night,
And saga-runes to wile our watch were sung,
That with the legends of our father's might
And wandering labours, this old tale was strung,
Then the roused King much question'd;—what we knew
We told, still question from each answer grew.

* According to the French romance writers, Lancelot was the son of King Ban of Benoic, a tributary to the Cymrian crown. The Welch claim him, however, as a national hero, in spite of his name, which they interpret as a translation from one of their own—Paladr-ddelt, splintered spear. (*Lady C. Guest's* MABINOGION, vol. i. p. 91.) In a subsequent page, Lancelot tells the tale (pretty nearly as it is told in the French romance) which obtained him the title of "Lancelot of the Lake." See note in ELLIS'S edition of WAY'S *Fabliaux*, vol. ii. p. 206.

LI.

"That night he slept not—with the morn was gone;
And the dove led him where the snow-storms sleep."
Then Lancelot rose, and led his destrier on,
And gained the boat, and motioned to the deep,
His purpose well the Alemen divine,
And launch once more the bark upon the brine.

LII.

And ask to aid—"Know, friends," replied the knight,
"Each wave that rolleth smooths its frown for me;
My sire and mother, by the lawless might
Of a fierce foe expell'd, and forced to flee
From the fair halls of BENOIC, paused to take
Breath for new woes, beside a Fairy's lake.

LIII.

"With them was I, their new-born helpless heir,—
The hunted exiles gazed afar on home,
And saw the fires that dyed like blood the air
Pall with the pomp of hell the crushing dome.
They clung, they gazed—no word by either spoken;
And in that hush the sterner heart was broken.

LIV.

"The woman felt the cold hand fail her own;
The head that lean'd fell heavy on the sod;
She knelt—she kiss'd the lips,—the breath was flown!
She call'd upon a soul that was with God:
For the first time the wife's sweet power was o'er—
She who had soothed till then could soothe no more!

LV.

"In the wife's woe, the mother was forgot.
At last—(for I was all earth held of him
Who had been all to her, and now was not)—
She rose, and look'd, with tearless eyes, but dim,
In the babe's face the father still to see;
And lo! the babe was on another's knee!—

LVI.

"Another's lip had kiss'd it into sleep,
And o'er the sleep another, watchful, smiled;—
The Fairy sate beside the lake's still deep,
And hush'd with chaunted charms the orphan child!
Scared at the cry the startled mother gave,
It sprang, and, snow-like, melted in the wave.

LVII.

"There, in calm halls of lucent chrystalline,
Fed by the dews that fell from golden stars,
But through the lymph I saw the sunbeams shine,
Nor dreamed a world beyond the glistening spars;
Buoy'd by a charm that still endows and saves,
In stream or sea, the nurseling of the waves.

LVIII.

"In my fifth year, to Uther's royal towers
The fairy bore me, and her charge resign'd.
My mother took the veil of Christ—the Hours
With Arthur's life the orphan's life entwined.
O'er mine own element my course I take—
All oceans smile on Lancelot of the Lake!"

LIX.

He said, and waived his hand: around the boat
The curlews hovered, as it shot to sea.
The wild men, lingering, watch'd the lessening float,
Till in the far expanse lost desolately,
Then slowly towards the hut they bent their way,
And the lone waves moaned up the lifeless bay.

LX.

Pass we the voyage. Hunger-worn, to shore
Gain'd man and steed; there food and rest they found
In humble roofs. The course, resumed once more,
Stretch'd inland o'er not unfamiliar ground;
The wanderer smiles, by tower and town, to see
Cymri's old oak rebloom in Brettanie.

LXI.

Nathless, no pause, save such as needful rest
Demands, delays him in the friendly land.
No tidings here of Arthur gain'd, his breast
Springs to the goal of the quick-moving hand,
Howbeit not barren of adventurous days,
Sweet Danger found him in the devious ways.

LXII.

What foes encountered, or what damsels freed—
What demon spells in lonely forests braving,
Leave we to songs yet vocal to the reed
On every bank, beloved by poets, waving;
Our task unborrow'd from the muse of old,
Takes but the tale by nobler bards untold.

LXIII.

Now as he journeys, frequent more and more
The traces of the steps he tracks are found;
Fame, like a light, shines broadening on before
His path, and cleaves the shadows on the ground;
High deeds and gentle, bruited near and far,
Show where that soul went flashing as a star.

LXIV.

At length he gains the Ausonian Alpine walls;
Here, castle, convent, town, and hamlet fade;
Lone, through the rolling mists, the hoof-tread falls;
Lone, earth's mute giants loom amidst the shade;
Yet still, as sure of hope, he tracks the king,
Up steep, through gorge, where guides the chrystal ring.

LXV.

One day—along by gloomy chasms his course—
He saw before him indistinctly pass
Through the dun fogs, what seemed a phantom horse,
Like that which oft, amidst the dank morass,
Bestrid by goblin-meteor, starts the eye—
So fleshless flitting—wan and shadowy.

LXVI.

By a bare rock it paused, and feebly neigh'd,
As the good knight, descending, seized the rein;
Dew-rusted mail the shrunken front array'd;
The rich selle rotted with the moulder-stain;
And on the selle were slung helm, axe, and mace;
And the great lance lay careless near the place.

LXVII.

Then first the seeker's stricken spirit fell;
Too well that helmet, with its dragon crest,
Speaks of the mighty owner; and too well
That steed, so oft by snowy hands carest,
When bright-eyed Beauty from the balcon bent
To crown the victor-lord of tournament.

LXVIII.

Near and afar he searched—he call'd in vain,
By crag and combe, nought answering, and nought seen;
Return'd, the charger long refused the rein,
Clinging, poor slave, where last its lord had been.
At length the slow reluctant hoofs obey'd
The soothing words; so went they through the shade:

LXIX.

Following the gorge that wound the Alpine wall,
Like the huge fosse of some Cyclopean town,
(While roaring round, invisible cataracts fall);
On the black rocks twilight comes ghostly down,
And deep and deeper still the windings go,
And dark and darker as to worlds below.

LXX.

Night halts the course, resumed at earliest day,
Through day pursued, till the last sunbeams fell
On a broad mere whose margin closed the way.
Hark! o'er the waters swung the holy bell
From a grey convent on the rising ground,
Amidst the subject hamlet stretch'd around.

LXXI.

Here, while both man and steeds the welcome rest
Under the sacred roof of Christ receive,
We turn once more to Ægle and her guest.
Lo! the sweet valley in the flush of eve!
Lo! side by side, where through the rose-arcade,
Steals the love star, the hero and the maid!

LXXII.

Silent they gaze into each other's eyes,
Stirring the inmost soul's unquiet sleep;
So pierce soft star-beams, blending wave and skies,
Some holy fountain trembling to its deep!
Bright to each eye each human heart is bare,
And scarce a thought to start an angel there!

LXXIII.

Love to the soul, whate'er the harsh may say,
Is as the hallowing Naïad to the well—
The linking life between the forms of clay
And those ambrosia nurtures; from its spell
Fly earth's rank fogs, and Thought's ennobled flow
Shines with the shape that glides in light below.

LXXIV.

Seize, O beloved, the blooms the Hour allows!
Alas, but once can flower the Beautiful!
Hark, the wind rustles thro' the trembling boughs,
And the stem withers while the buds ye cull!
Brief though the prize, how few in after hours
Can say, "at least the Beautiful *was* ours!"

LXXV.

Two loves (and both divine and pure) there are;
One by the roof-tree takes its root for ever,
Nor tempests rend, nor changeful seasons mar—
It clings the stronger for the storm's endeavour;
Beneath its shade the way-worn find their rest,
And in its boughs the calm bird builds its nest.

LXXVI.

But one more frail, (in that more prized, perchance,)
Bends its rich blossoms over lonely streams
In the untrodden ways of wild Romance,
On earth's far confines, like the Tree of Dreams,*
Few find the path;—O bliss! O woe to find!
What bliss the blossom!—ah! what woe the wind!

LXXVII.

Oh, the short spring!—the eternal winter!—All
Branch,—stem all shattered; fragile as the bloom!
Yet this the love that charms us to recall;
Life's golden holiday before the tomb;
Yea! *this* the love which age again lives o'er,
And hears the heart beat loud with youth once more!

LXXVIII.

Before them, at the distance, o'er the blue
Of the sweet waves which girt the rosy isle,
Flitted light shapes the inwoven alleys thro':
Remotely mellowed, musical the while,
Floated the hum of voices, and the sweet
Lutes chimed with timbrels to dim-glancing feet.

* "In medio ramos," &c.—VIRGIL, l. vi. 282.
"An elm displays her dusky arms abroad,
And empty dreams on every leaf are spread."—DRYDEN.

LXXIX.

The calm swan rested on the breathless glass
Of dreamy waters, and the snow-white steer
Near the opposing margin, motionless,
Stood, knee-deep, gazing wistful on its clear
And life-like shadow, shimmering deep and far,
Where on the lucid darkness fell the star.

LXXX.

Near them, upon its lichen-tinted base,
Gleamed one of those fair fancied images
Which art hath lost—no god of Idan race,
But the wing'd symbol which, by Caspian seas,
Or Susa's groves, its parable addrest
To the wild faith of Iran's Zendavest.*

LXXXI.

Light as the soul, whose archetype it was,
The Genius touched, yet spurn'd the pedestal;
Behind, the foliage, in its purple mass,
Shut out the flush'd horizon; clasping all,
Nature's hush'd giants stood to guard and girth
The only home of peace upon the earth.

* ZENDAVEST. Compare the winged genius of the Etrurians with the Feroher of the Persians, in the sculptured reliefs of Persepolis. (See HEEREN'S *Historical Researches, Art. Persians.*) MICALI, vol. ii. p. 174, points out some points of similarity between the Persian and Etrurian cosmogony. It was peculiar to the Etrurians, amongst the classic nations of Europe, to delineate their deities with wings. Even when they borrowed some Hellenic god, they still invested him with this attribute, so especially Eastern.

LXXXII.

And when, at last, from Ægle's lips, the voice
Came soft as murmur'd hymns at closing day,
The sweet sound seem'd the sweet air to rejoice—
To give the sole charm wanting,—to convey
The crowning music to the Musical;
As with the soul of love infusing all!

LXXXIII.

And to the Northman's ear that antique tongue,
Which from the Augur's lips fell weird and cold,
Seem'd as the thread in fairy tales,* which strung
Enchanted pearls, won from the caves of old,
And woven round a sunbeam;—so was wrought
O'er cordial love the pure and delicate thought.

LXXXIV.

She spoke of youth's lost years, so lone before,
And coming to the present, paused and blushed;
As if Time's wing were spell-bound evermore,
And Life, the restless, in the hour were hushed:
The pause, the blush, said, more than words, "And thou
Art found!—thou lov'st me!—Fate is powerless now!"

LXXXV.

That hand in his—that heart his own entwining
With its life's tendrils,—youth his pardoner be,
If in his heaven no loftier star were shining—
If round the haven boom'd unheard the sea—
If in the wreath forgot the thorny crown,
And the harsh duties of severe renown.

* In a legend of Bretagne, a fairy weaves pearls round a sunbeam, to convince her lover of her magical powers.

LXXXVI.

Blame we as well the idlesse of a dream,
As that entranced oblivion from the reign
Of the Great Curse, which glares in every beam
Of labouring suns to the stern race of Cain;
So life from earth did Nature here withdraw,
That the strange peace seem'd but earth's common law.

LXXXVII.

Yet some excuse all stronger spirits take
For all repose from toil (to strength the doom)
How sweet in that fair heathen soil to wake
The living palm God planted on the tomb!
And so, and long, did Passion's subtle art
Mask with the soul the impulse of the heart.

LXXXVIII.

Wonderous and lovely in that last retreat
Of the old Gods,—the simple speech to hear
Tell of the Messenger whose beauteous feet
Had gilt the mountain-tops with tidings clear
Of veilless Heaven—while Ægle, thoughtful, said,
"This love makes plain—yes, love can ne'er be dead!"

LXXXIX.

Now, as Night gently deepens round them, while
Oft to the moon upturn their happy eyes—
Still, hand in hand, they range the lullëd isle,
Air knows no breeze, scarce sighing to their sighs;
No bird of night shrieks bode from drowsy trees,
Nought lives between them and the Pleïades;

XC.

Save where the moth strains to the moon its wing,
Deeming the Reachless near;—the prophet race
Of the cold stars forewarn'd them not; the Ring
Of great Orion, who for the embrace
Of Morn's sweet Maid had died,* look'd calm above
The last unconscious hours of human love.

XCI.

Each astral influence unrevealing shone
O'er the dark web its solemn thread enwove;
Mars shot no anger from his fatal throne,
No beam spoke trouble in the House of Love;
Their closing path the treacherous smile illum'd;
And the stern Star-kings kiss'd the brows they doom'd—

XCII.

'Tis morn once more; upon the shelving green
Of the small isle, alone the Cymrian stood
With his full heart,—when suddenly, between
Him and the sun, the azure solitude
Was broken by a dark and rapid wing,
And a dusk bird swooped downward to the King.

XCIII.

And the King's cheek grew pale, for well to him,
(As now the raven, settling, touch'd his feet,)
Was known the mystic messenger:—where, grim
O'er the Black Valley,† demon shadows fleet
Glass'd on the lake whose horror scares away
Each harmless wing that skims the golden day,

* Hom. *Odys.* l. 5.

† Cwm Idwal (in Snowdonia). "A fit place to inspire murderous thoughts,—environed with horrible precipices shading a lake lodged in its bottom. The shepherds fable that it is the haunt of demons, and that no bird dare fly over its damned waters."—PENNANT, v. iii. p. 324.

XCIV.

The Prophet's dauntless childhood stray'd and found
The weird bird muttering by the waves of dread;
Three days and nights upon the haunted ground
The raven's beak the solemn infant fed:
And ever after (so the legend ran)
The lone bird tended on the lonely man.

XCV.

O'er the Man's temples fell the snows of age,
As fresh the lustrous ebon of the Bird,—
Less awe had credulous terror of the sage
Than that familiar by the Fiend conferr'd—
So thought the crowd; nor knew what holy lore
Lives in all things whose instinct is to soar.—

XCVI.

Hoarse croaks the bird, and, with its round bright eye,
Fixes the gaze of the recoiling King;
Slowly the hand, that trembles, cuts the tie
Which binds the white scroll gleaming from the wing,
And these the words, "Weak Loiterer from thy toil,
The Saxon's march is on thy father's soil."

XCVII.

Bounded the Prince!—As when the sudden sun
Looses the ice-chains on the halted rill,
Smites the dumb snow-mass, and the cataracts run
In molten thunder down the clanging hill,
So from his heart the fetters burst; and strong
In its rough course the great soul rush'd along.

XCVIII.

As looks a warrior on the fort he scales,
His glance darts round the everlasting steeps—
Not there escape!—the wildest fancy quails
Before those heights on which the whitening deeps
Of measureless heaven repose:—below their frown,
Planed as a wall, sheers the smooth granite down.—

XCIX.

Marvel, indeed, how ev'n the enchanted wing
Had o'er such rampires won to the abode;
But not for marvel paused the kindled King,
Swift, as Pelides stung to war, he strode;
While the dark herald, with its sullen scream,
Rose, and fled, dismal as an evil dream.

C.

Carved as for Love—a slender boat rock'd o'er
The ripple with the murmuring marge at play,
He loosed its chain, he gain'd the adverse shore,
Startled the groups that fluttered round his way,
Awed by the knitted brow and flashing eyes
Of him they deemed the native of the skies.

CI.

As towards the fane, which closed on hardy life
The granite path to Labour's world behind,
O'er trampled flowers, strode the stern Child of Strife,
He saw the melancholly priest reclin'd
Under the shade of hush'd Dodonian boughs,
Bending, o'er mystic scrolls, calm, mournful brows—

CII.

Loud on that musing leisure broke the cry
Of the imperious Northman, "Rise, unbar
Your granite gates—the eagle seeks the sky,
The captive freedom, and the warrior war!"
Slow rose the Augur, and this answer gave,
"Man, see thy world—its outlet is the grave!

CIII.

"Thou hast our secret! Thou must share our fates:
The Alps and Orcus guard ourselves—and thee!
To what new Mars shall Janus ope the gates?
Thou speak'st of war,—and then demand'st the key!"
Scornful he turn'd—but thrill'd with wrath to feel
His sacred arm lock'd in a grasp of steel.

CIV.

"Trifle not, host,—Fate calls me to depart;
On my shamed soul a prophet's voice hath cried'
Nor Alps nor Orcus like a loyal heart
Ensures the secret trustful lips confide."
The Augur sneer'd—"A loyal heart, forsooth!
And what says Ægle of the stranger's truth?"

CV.

"Let Ægle answer," cried the noble lover;
"Let Ægle judge the trust I hold from Heaven.
I faithless!—I!—a King?—my labours over,
From mine own soil the surge of carnage driven,
And I will come, as kings should come, to claim
Mates for the throne, and partners for the fame!"—

CVI.

Long mused the Augur, and at length replied,
His guile scarce mask'd in his malignant gaze,
"Take, as thou say'st, an answer from thy bride—
Then, if still wearied of untroubled days—
No more from Mantu*, Pales shall control
And one free gate shall open on thy soul!"

CVII.

He said, and drew his large robe round his form,
And wrathful swept along, as o'er the sky
A cloud sweeps dark, secret with hoarded storm;
Behind him went the guest as silently;
Afar the gazing wonderers whispered, while
They crossed the girdling wave and reach'd the isle.

CVIII.

With violet buds, bright Ægle, in her bower,
Knits the dark riches of her lustrous hair;
Her heart springs eager to the magic hour
When to loved eyes 'tis glorious to be fair:
Gleams of a neck, proud as the swan's, escape
The light-spun tunic rounded to the shape.

CIX.

The airy veil, its silver cloud dividing,
Falls, and floats fragrant, from the violet crown.
What happy thought is in that breast presiding
Like some serenest bird that settles down
(Its wanderings over) on calm summer eves
Into its nest, amid the secret leaves?

* MANTU, the God of the Shades—PALES, the Pastoral Deity.

CX.

What happy thought in those large tranquil eyes
Speaks of a bliss remote from human fear?
Speaks of a soul which like a star supplies
Its own circumfluent lustrous atmosphere;
Weaves beam on beam around its peace, and glows
Soft thro' the splendour which itself bestows?

CXI.

Who ever gazed on perfect happiness,
Nor felt it as the shadow cast from God?
It seems so still in its sublime excess,
So brings all heaven around its hush'd abode,
That in its very beauty awe has birth,
Dismay'd by too much glory for the earth.

CXII.

Across the threshold now abruptly strode
Her youth's stern guardian. "Child of RASENA,"
He said, "the lover on thy youth bestowed
For the last time on earth thine eyes survey,
Unless thy power can chain the faithless breast,
And sated bliss deigns gracious to be blest."

CXIII.

"Not so!" cried Arthur, as his loyal knee
Bent to the earth, and with the knightly truth
Of his right hand he clasped her own;—"to be
Thine evermore; youth mingled with thy youth,
Age with thine age; in thy grave mine; above,
Soul with thy soul—this is the Christian's love!

CXIV.

" Oft wouldst thou smile, believing smile, to hear
Thy lover speak of knighthood's holy vow—
That vow holds falsehood more abhorr'd than fear,—
And canst thou doubt both love and knighthood now? "
His words rush'd on—told of the threatened land,
The fates confided to the sceptred hand,

CXV.

Here gathering woes, and there suspended toil;
And the stern warning from the distant seer.
" Thine be my people—thine this bleeding soil;
Queen of my realm, its groaning murmurs hear!
Then ask thyself, what manhood's choice should be;
False to my country, were I worthy thee?"

CXVI.

Dim through her struggling sense the light came slow,
Struck from those words of fire. Alas, poor child!
What, in thine isle of roses, shouldst thou know
Of earth's grave duties?—of that stormy wild
Of care and carnage—the relentless strife
Of man with happiness, and soul with life?

CXVII.

Thou who hadst seen the sun but rise and set
O'er one Saturnian Arcady of rest,
Snatch'd from the Age of Iron? Ever, yet,
Dwells that fine instinct in the noble breast,
Which each high truth intuitive receives,
And what the Reason grasps not, Faith believes.

CXVIII.

So in mute woe, one hand to his resign'd,
And one press'd firmly on her swelling heart,
Passive she heard, and in her labouring mind
Strove with the dark enigma—"part!—to part!"
Till, having solved it by the beams that broke
From that clear soul on hers, struggling she spoke:—

CXIX.

"Thou bidst me trust thee!—This is my reply:
Trust is my life—to trust thee is to live!
And ev'n farewell less bitter than thy sigh
For something Ægle is too poor to give.
Thou speak'st of dread and terror, strife and woe;
And I might wonder why they tempt thee so;

CXX.

"And I might ask how more can mortals please
The heavens, than thankful to enjoy the earth?
But through its mist my soul, though faintly, sees
Where thine sweeps on beyond this mountain girth,
And, awed and dazzled, bending I confess
Life may have holier ends than happiness!

CXXI.

"Yes, as thou offerest joy upon the shrine
Of some bright good, all human joys above,
So does my heart its altar seek in thine,
Content to bleed:—Thee, not myself, I love!"
Sighing, she ceased; yet air still seemed to sigh,
As doth the wave on which the zephyrs die.

CXXII.

Then, as she felt his tears upon her hand,
Sorrow woke sorrow, and her face she bow'd:
As when the silver gates of heaven expand,
And on the earth descends the melting cloud,
So sunk the spirit from sublimer air,
And all the woman rush'd on her despair.

CXXIII.

"To lose thee—oh, to lose thee! To live on
And see the sun—not thee! Will the sun shine,
Will the birds sing, flowers bloom, when thou art gone?
Desolate, desolate! Thy right hand in mine,
Swear, by the Past, thou wilt return!—Oh, say,
Say it again!"——voice died in sobs away!

CXXIV.

Mute look'd the Augur, with his deathful eyes,
On the last anguish of their lock'd embrace.
"Priest," cried the lover, "canst thou deem this prize
Lost to my future?—No, tho' round the place
Yon Alps took life, with all the dire array
Of demon legions, Love would force the way.

CXXV.

"Hear me, adored one!" On the silent ear
The promise fell, and o'er the unconscious frame
Wound the protecting arm.—"Since neither fear
Of the great Powers thou dost blaspheming name,
Nor the soft impulse native in man's heart
Restrains thee, doom'd one—hasten to depart.

CXXVI.

"Come, in thy treason merciful at least,
Come, while those eyes by pitying slumbers bound,
See not thy shadow pass from earth!"——The priest
Spoke,—and now call'd the infant handmaids round;
But o'er that form with arms that vainly cling,
And words that idly comfort, bends the King.

CXXVII.

"Nay, nay, look up! It is these arms that fold;—
I still am here;—this hand, these tears, are mine."
Then, when they sought to loose her from his hold,
He waived them back with a fierce jealous sign;
O'er her hush'd breath his listening ear he bow'd,
And the awed children round him wept aloud.

CXXVIII.

But when the soul broke faint from its eclipse,
And his own name came, shaping life's first sigh,
His very heart seem'd breaking in the lips
Press'd to those faithful ones;—then, tremblingly,
He rose;—he moved;—he paused;—his nerveless hand
Veil'd the dread agony of man unmann'd.

CXXIX.

Thus, from the chamber, as an infant meek
The priest's weak arm led forth the mighty King;
In vain wide air came fresh upon his cheek,
Passive he went in his great sorrowing;
Hate, the mute guide,—the waves of death, the goal;—
So, following Hermes, glides to Styx a soul.

NOTES TO BOOK IV.

1 "*Like that in which the far Saronides*
Exchanged dark riddles with the Samian sage."

Page 113, stanza xi.

DIODORUS SICULUS speaks with great respect of the SARONIDES as the Druid priests of Gaul; and Mr. Davis, in his Celtic researche, insists upon it that *Saronides* is a British word, compounded from *sêr*, stars; and *honydd*, "one who discriminates or points out:" in fine, according to him the Saronides are Seronyddion, i. e. *astronomers*. For the initiation of Pythagoras into the Druid mysteries, see CLEM. ALEX. *Strom. L. i. Ex. Alex. Polyphist.* It will be observed that the author here takes advantage of the well-known assertions of many erudite authorities that the Phœnician language is the parent of the Celtic, in order to obtain a channel of oral communication between Arthur and the Etrurian;* though, contented with those authorities, as sufficing for all poetic purpose, he prudently declines entering into a controversy equally abstruse and interminable, as to the affinity between the countrymen of Dido and the scattered

* It may perhaps occur to the reader that Latin, with which Arthur (in an age so shortly subsequent to the Roman occupation of Britain) could scarcely fail to be well acquainted, might have furnished a better mode of communication between himself and the Augur. But the Latin language would have been very imperfectly settled at the time of the supposed Etrurian emigration; would have had small connection with the literature, sacred or profane, of the Etrurians; and would long have been despised as a rude medley of various tongues and dialects, by the proud and polished race which the Romans subjected.

remnants of the Briton. It is not surprising that the Augur should know Phœnician, for we have only to suppose that he maintained, as well as he could in his retreat, the knowledge common among his priestly forefathers. The intercourse between Etruria and the Phœnician states, (especially Carthage), was too considerable not to have rendered the language of the last familiar to the learning of the first;—to say nothing of those more disputable affinities of origin and religion, which, if existing, would have made ßà acquaintance with Phœnician necessary to the solution of their historical chronicles and sacred books. Nor, when the Augur afterwards assures Arthur that Ægle also understands Phœnician, is any extravagant demand made upon the credulity of the indulgent reader; for those who have consulted such lights as research has thrown upon Etrurian records, are aware that their more high-born women appear to have received no ordinary mental cultivation.

[2] *"Ah," said the Augur, "here I comprehend*
Ægypt, and Typhon, and the serpent creed."

Page 117, stanza xxii.

It is clear that all which the bewildered Augur could comprehend, in the theological relations by which Arthur (no doubt with equal glibness and obscurity) relieves his historical narrative, would be that, in "worsting Satan," the Emperor of Greece is demolishing the Typhon worship of the Ægyptians, and enforcing the adoration of the Dorian Apollo—that deity who had passed a probation on earth, and expiated a mysterious sin by descending to the shades; and it would require a more erudite teacher than we can presume Arthur to be before the Augur would cease to confuse with the Pagan divinity the Divine Founder of the Christian gospel.

KING ARTHUR.

BOOK V.

ARGUMENT.

The Council-hall in Carduel—The twelve Knights of the Round Table described, viz., the three Knights of Council, the three Knights of Battle, the three Knights of Eloquence, and the three Lovers—Merlin warns the chiefs of the coming Saxons, and enjoins the beacon-fires to be lighted—The story returns to Arthur—The dove has not been absent, though unseen—It comes back to Arthur—The Priest leads the King through the sepulchral valley into the temple of the Death-god—Description of the entrance of the temple, with the walls on which is depicted the progress of the guilty soul through the realms below—The cave, the raft, and the stream which conducts to the cataract—Arthur enters the boat, and the dove goes before him—Ægle awakes from her swoon, and follows the King to the temple—Her dialogue with the Augur—She disappears in the stream—Meanwhile Lancelot wanders in the vallies on the other side of the Alps, and is led to the cataract by the magic ring—The apparition of the dove—He follows the bird up the skirts of the cataract—He finds Arthur and Ægle, and conveys them to the convent—The Christian hymn, and the Etrurian dirge—Arthur and Lancelot seated by the lake—The Lady of the Lake appears in her pinnace to Lancelot—The King's sight is purged from its film by the bitter herb, and he enters the magic bark.

BOOK V.

I.

In the high Council Hall of Carduel,
Beside the absent Arthur's ivory throne,
(What time the earlier shades of evening fell),
Wan-silvering through the hush, the cresset shone
O'er the arch seer,—as, mid the magnates there,
Rose his large front august with prophet care;

II.

Rose his large front above the luminous guests,
The deathless TWELVE of that Heroic Ring,
Which, as the belt wherein Orion rests,
Girded with subject stars the starry king;
Without, strong towers guard Rome's elaborate wall;
Within is Manhood!—strongest tower of all.

III.

First, Muse of Cymri, name the Council Three*
Who, of maturer years and graver mien,
Wise in the past, conceived the things to be,
And temper'd impulse quick with thought serene;
Nor young, nor old—no dupes to rushing Hope,
Nor narrowing to tame Fear the' ignoble scope.

* Three counselling knights were in the court of Arthur, which were Cynon the son of Clydno Eiddin, Aron the son of Kynfarch ap Meirchion-gul, and Llywarch hen the son of Elidir Lydanwyn, etc.—*Note in Lady Charlotte Guest's edition of the Mabinogion*, vol i. p. 93. In the text, for the sake of euphony to English ears, for the name of Llywarch is substituted that of his father Elidir.

IV.

Of these was Cynon of the highborn race,
A cold but dauntless—calm but earnest man;
With deep eyes shining from a thoughtful face,
And spare slight form, for ever in the van
When ripening victories crown'd laborious deeds;
Reaper of harvests—sower not of seeds;

V.

For scarcely his the quick far-darting soul
Which, like Apollo's shaft, strikes lifeless things
Into divine creation; but, the whole
Once rife, the skill which into concord brings
The jarring parts; shapes out the rudely wrought,
And calls the action living from the thought.

VI.

Next Aron see—not rash, yet gaily bold,
With the frank polish of chivalric courts;
Him from the right, no fear of wrong controul'd;
And toil he deem'd the sprightliest of his sports;
O'er War's dry chart, or Wisdom's mystic page,
Alike as smiling, and alike as sage;

VII.

With the warm instincts of the knightly heart
That rose at once if insult touch'd the realm,
He spurn'd each state-craft, each deceiving art,
And rode to war, no vizor to his helm;
This proved his worth, this line his tomb may boast—
'Who hated Cymri, hated Aron most!'

VIII.

But who with eastern hues and haughty brow,
Stern with dark beauty sits apart from all?
Ah, couldst thou shun thy friends, Elidir!—thou
Scorning all foes, before no foe shalt fall!
On thy wronged grave one hand appeasing lays
The humble flower—oh, could it yield the bays!

IX.

Courts may have known than thou a readier tool,
States may have found than thine a subtler brain,
But States shall honour many a formal fool,
And many a tawdry fawner courts may gain,
Ere King or People in their need shall see
A soul as grand as that which fled with thee!

X.

For thou wert more than true; thou wert a Truth!
Open as Truth, and yet as Truth profound;
Thy fault was genius—that eternal youth
Whose weeds but prove the richness of the ground—
And dull men envied thee, and false men feared,
And where soared genius, there convention sneer'd.

XI.

Ah, happy hadst thou fallen, foe to foe,
The bright race run—the laurel o'er thy grave!
But hands perfidious strung the ambush bow,
And the friend's shaft the rankling torture gave—
The last proud wish its agony to hide,
The stricken deer to covert crept and died.

XII.

Next came the Warrior Three.* Of glory's charms
(Glory, the bride of heroes) nobly vain
Dark Mona's Owaine† shines with golden arms,
The Roland of the Cymrian Charlemain,
Scathed by the storm the holy chief survives,
For Fame makes holy all its lightning rives.

XIII.

Beside, with simplest garb and sober mien,
Solid as iron, not yet wrought to steel,
In his plain manhood Cornwall's chief‡ is seen,
Who (if wild tales some glimpse of truth reveal)
Gave Northern standards to the Indian sun—
And wreaths from palms that shaded Evian won.

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* Three knights of battle were in the court of Arthur; Cadwr the Earl of Cornwall, Lancelot du Lac, and Owaine the son of Urien Rheged; and this was their characteristic, that they would not retreat from battle, neither for spear, nor for arrow, nor for sword; and Arthur never had shame in battle the day he saw their faces there, etc.—*Lady C. Guest's Mabinog.* vol. i. p. 91. In the poem, for Lancelot of the Lake, whose fame is not yet supposed to be matured, is substituted the famous Geraint, the hero of a former generation.

† Owaine's birth-place and domains are variously surmised: in the text they are ascribed to Mona, (Anglesey). St. Palaye, concurrently both with French fabliasts and Welch bards, makes this hero very fond of the pomp and blazonry of arms, and attributes to him the introduction of buckles to spurs, furred mantles, and the use of gloves.

‡ Cadwr.

XIV.

Lo he whose fame outshines the Fabulous!
Sublime with eagle front, and that grey crown
Which Age, the arch-priest, sets on laurell'd brows;
Lo, Geraint, bending with a world's renown!
Yet those gray hairs *one* ribald scoffer found;—
The moon sways ocean and provokes the hound.

XV.

Next the three Chiefs of Eloquence;* the kings
Whose hosts are thoughts, whose realm the human mind,
Who out of words evoke the souls of things,
And shape the lofty drama of mankind;
Wit charms the fancy, wisdom guides the sense;
To make men nobler—*that* is Eloquence!

XVI.

As from the Mount of Gold, auriferous flows
The Lydian wave, thy pomp of period shines,
Resplendent Drydas—glittering as it goes
High from the mount, but labouring through the mines,
And thence the tides, enriching while they run,
Glass every fruit that ripens to the sun.

XVII.

But, like the vigour of a Celtic stream,
Comes Lolod's rush of manly sense along,
Fresh with the sparkles of a healthful beam,
And quick with impulse like a poet's song.
How listening crowds that knightly voice delights—
If from those crowds are banished all but knights!

* There were three golden-tongued knights in the court of Arthur—Gwalchmai (Gawaine), Drudwas (Drydas in the text), and Eliwlod (Lolod). *Lady C. Guest's Mabinog.* note vol. i. p. 118.

XVIII.

The third, though young, well worthy of his place,
Was Gawaine, courteous, blithe, and debonnair,
Arch Mercury's wit, with careless Cupid's face;
Frank as the sun, but searching as the air,
Who with bland parlance prefaced doughtiest blows,
And mildly arguing—arguing brain'd his foes.

XIX.

Next came the Three—in mystic Triads hight
"The KNIGHTS OF LOVE;" * some type the name conveys,
For where no lover, there methinks no knight;
All knights were lovers in King Arthur's days:
Caswallawn; Trystan of the lion rock; †
And, leaning on his harp, calm Caradoc!

XX.

Thus class'd, distinct in peace,—let war dismay,
Straight in one bond the divers natures blend—
So varying tints in tranquil sunshine play,
But form one iris if the rains descend;
And, fused in light against the clouds that lower,
Forbid the deluge while they own the shower!

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* The three ardent lovers of the island of Britain—Caswallawn, Tristan, and Cynon, (for the last, already placed amongst the counselling knights, Caradoc is substituted).—*Lady C. Guest's Mabinog.* vol. i. note to page 94.

† Trystan's birth-place, Lyonness, is supposed to have been that part of Cornwall since destroyed by the sea. See Southey's note to Morte d'Arthur, vol. ii. p. 477.

XXI.

On the bright group the Prophet rests his gaze,
Then the deep voice sonorous thrills aloud—
"In Carduel's vale the steers unheeded graze,
To jocund winds the yellowing corn is bow'd,
By hearths of mirth the waves of Isca flow,
And Heaven above smiles down on peace below.

XXII.

"But far looks forth the warder from the tower,
And to the halls of Cymri's antique kings
A soul that sees the future in the hour
The desolation of its burthen brings;
Hollow sounds earth beneath the clanging tread:
Yon fields shall yield no harvest but the Dead!

XXIII.

"And waves shall rush in crimson to the deep,
The Meteor Horse shall pale autumnal skies—
From RAURAN'S lairs the joyous wolves shall leap—
From EIFLE'S crags the screaming eagles rise—
Yea! while I speak, these halls the havoc nears!
Red sets the sun behind the storm of spears!

XXIV.

"The Sons of Woden sound no tromp before
Their march! No herald comes their war to tell!
No plea for slaughter, dress'd in clerkly lore,
Makes death seem justice! As the rain clouds swell,
When air is stillest, in BÂL HUAN'S halls;
The herbage waves not till the tempest falls!

XXV.

"Of old ye know them; ye the elect remains
Of perish'd races—rock-saved; anchoring here
The ark of empire!
For your latest fanes,
For your last hearths, for all to freemen dear,
And to God sacred; take the shield and brand!
Accurst each Cymrian who survives his land!"

XXVI.

"Accurst each Cymrian who survives his land!"
Echoed deep tones, hollow as blasts escaped
From Boreal caverns, and in every hand
The hilts of swords to sainted croziers shaped
Were grimly griped—as by that symbol sign
Hallowing the human wrath to war divine.

XXVII.

The Prophet mark'd the deep unclamorous vow
Of the pent passion; and the morning light
Of young Humanity flash'd o'er the brow
Dark with that wisdom which, like Nature's night,
Communes with stars and dreams; it flash'd and waned,
And the vast front its awful hush regain'd.

XXVIII.

"Princes, I am but as a voice; be you
As deeds! The wind comes through the hollow oak,
And stirs the green woods that it wanders through,
Now wafts the seeds, now wings the levin stroke,
Now kindles, now destroys;—that Wind am I,
Homeless on earth; the mystery of the sky!

XXIX.

"But when the wind in noiseless air hath sunk,
Behold the sower tends and rears the seeds;
Behold the woodman shapes the fallen trunk;
The viewless voice hath waked the human deeds;
Born of the germs, flowers bloom and harvests spring;
The pine uprooted speeds the Ocean King.

XXX.

"Warriors, since absent, (not from wanton lust
Of errant emprize, but by Fate ordained,
For all lone labouring, worthy of his trust)
He whose young lips in thirst of glory drained
All that of arts Mavortian, elder Rome
Taught to assail the foe, or guard the home;

XXXI.

"Be ye his delegates, and oft with prayer
Bring angels round his wild and venturous way;
As one great orb gives life and light to air,
So times there are when all a people's day
Shines from a single life! This known, revere
The exile; mourn not—let his soul be here.

XXXII.

"Yours then, high chiefs, the conduct of the war,
But heed this counsel (won or wrung from Fate)
Strong rolls the tide when curb'd its channels are,
Strong flows the force that but defends a state;
In Carduel's walls concentre Cymri's power,
And chain the dragon to his charmed tower.

XXXIII.

"This night the moon should see the beacon brand
Link fire to fire from Beli's Druid pile;
Rock call on rock, till blazes all the land
From Sabra's wave to Mona's parent isle!
Let Freedom write in characters of fire,
'Who climbs my throne ascends his funeral pyre!'"

XXXIV.

The Prophet ceased; and rose with stern accord
The warrior senate. Sudden every shield
Leapt into lightning from the clashing sword;
And choral voices consentaneous peal'd—
"Hail to our guests! the wine of war is red;
Fire light the banquet—steel prepare the bed!"

XXXV.

While thus the peril threat'ning land and throne,
Unarmed, unheeding, dreaming, goes the King,
Where from the brief Elysium, Acheron
Awaits the victim which its priest shall bring.
And where art thou, meek guardian of the brave?
Though fails the eagle, still the dove may save!

XXXVI.

When, lured by signs that seem'd his aid to' implore,
From his good steed the lord of knighthood sprung,
[And left it wistful by the dismal door,
Since the cragg'd roof too low-descending hung
For the great war-horse in its barb'd array;
And little dreamed he of the long delay,—]

XXXVII.

His path the dove nor favoured nor forbade;
Motionless, folding on sharp rocks its wing,
With its soft eyes it watch'd, resign'd and sad,
Where fates, ordain'd for sorrow, led the King;
Nor did he miss, (till earth regained the day)
The plumëd angel vanish'd from his way.

XXXVIII.

Then oft, in truth, and oft in blissful hours,
Miss'd was that faithful guide through stormier life.
Ah common lot! how oft, mid summer flowers,
We miss the soother of the winter strife;
How oft we mourn in Fortune's sunlit vale
Some silenced heart with which we shared the gale!

XXXIX.

But absent *not* the dove, albeit unseen;
In some still foliage it had found its nest:
At night it hovered where his steps had been,
Pale through the moonbeams in the air of rest;
By the lull'd wave and shadowy banks it pass'd,
Lingering where love with Ægle lingered last.

XL.

And when with chiller dawn resought the lone
And leafy gloom in which it shunn'd the day,
Beneath those boughs you might have heard it moan,
Low-wailing to itself its plaintive lay;
Till with the sun rose all the songs that fill
Morn with delight; and *then* the dove was still.

XLI.

But now, as towards the Temple of the Shades
The King went heavily—a gleam of light
Shot through the gloaming of the cedarn glades,
And the dove glided to his breast: the sight
Came like a smile from heaven upon the King,
And his heart warmed beneath the brooding wing.

XLII.

Strange was the thrill of joy, beyond belief,
Sent from the soft touch of those plumes of down!
He was not all deserted in his grief,
The brows of Fate relax'd their iron frown;
And his soul quickened to that glorious power
Which fronts the future and subdues the hour;

XLIII.

The joy it brought, the dove refused to share;
As if it felt the tempest in the sky,
Trembling, it nestled to its shelter there,
Nor lifted to the light its drooping eye,
Not, as its wont, to guide it came; but brave
With him the ills from which it could not save.

XLIV.

Now lost the lovelier features of the land,
Dull waves replace the fount, dark pines the bowers,
Grey-streeted tombs, far stretch'd on either hand,
Rear the dumb city of the Funeral Powers.
Massive and huge, behold the dome of dread,
Where the stern Death-god frowns above the dead.

XLV.

Hewn from a rock, stand the great columns square,
With tryglyphs wrought and ponderous pediment;
Such as yet greet the musing wanderer where,
Near the old Fane to which Etruria sent
Her sovereign twelve, the thick-sown violet blooms,
In Castel d'Asso's vale of hero-tombs.*

XLVI.

Passing a bridge that spann'd the barrier wave,
They reach the Thebes-like porch;—the Augur here
First entering, leaves the King. Within the nave
Now swell the flutes (which went before the bier
What time the funeral chaunt of Pagan Rome
Knell'd some throne-shatterer to his six-feet home.)

XLVII.

Jar back the portals—long, in measured line,
There, stand within the mute Aruspices,
In each pale hand a torch; and near the shrine
Sit on still thrones, the guardian deities;
Here SETHLANS,† sovereign of life's fix'd domains—
There fatal NORTHIA with the iron chains.

* Castel d'Asso (the Castellum Axia, in Cicero), the name now given to the vallies near Viterbo, which formed the great burial-place of the Etrurians. Near these vallies, and, as some suppose, on the site of Viterbo, was Voltumna (Fanum Voltumnæ), at which the twelve sovereigns of the twelve dynasties, and the other chiefs of the Etrurians, met in the spring of every year. Views of the rock-temples at Norchea, in this neighbourhood, are to be seen in INGHIRAMI'S *Etrusc. Antiq.*

† SETHLANS, the Etrurian Vulcan. He appears sometimes to assume the attributes of Terminus, though in a higher and more ethereal sense—presiding over the bounds of life as Terminus over those of the land.

XLVIII.

Between the two the Death-god broods sublime;
On his pale brow the inexorable peace
Which speaks of power beyond the shores of time;
Calm, not benign like the sweet gods of Greece,
Calm as the mystery, which in Memphian skies,
Froze life's warm current from a sphinx's eyes.

XLIX.

With many a grausame shape unutterable,
Limn'd were the cavernous sepulchral walls;
Life-like they stalk'd, the Populace of Hell,
Through the pale pomp of Acherontian halls;
Distinct as when the Trojan's living breath,
Vex'd the wide silence in the wastes of death.

L.

Shown was the Progress of the guilty Soul
From earth's warm threshold to the throne of doom;
Here the black genius to the dismal goal
Dragg'd the wan spectre from the unshelt'ring tomb;
While from the side it never more may warn
The better angel, sorrowing, fled forlorn.

LI.

Hideous with horrent looks and goading steel
The fiend drives on the abject cowering ghost
Where (closed the eighth) sev'n yawning gates reveal
The sev'nfold anguish that awaits the Lost;
By each the gryphon flaps his ravening wings,
And dire Chimæra whets her hungry stings.

LII.

Here, ev'n that God, of all the kindliest one,
Life of all life (in Tusca's later creed,
Blent with the orient worship of the Sun,
Or His who loves the madding nymphs to lead
On the Fork'd Hill)—abjures his genial smile,*
And, scowls transform'd, the Typhon of the Nile.

LIII.

Closed the eighth gate—for *there*, the happy dwell!
No glimpse of joy beyond makes horror less.
But that closed gate upon the exiled hell
Sets hell's last seal of misery—Hopelessness!
Nathless, despite the Dæmon's chacing thong,
Here, as if hoping still, the hopeless throng.

LIV.

Before the northern knight each nightmare dream
Of Theban soothsayer or Chaldean mage,
Thus kindling in the torches' breathless beam,
As if incarnate with resistless rage,
And hell's true malice, starts from wall to wall;
He signs the cross, and looks unmoved on all.

* TINIA, the Etrurian Bacchus (son of Tina), identified symbolically with the god of the infernal regions. In the funeral monuments he sometimes assumes the most fearful aspect. The above description of the Etrurian Hades, with its eight gates, is taken in each detail from vases and funeral monuments, most of which are cited by MICALI.

LV.

Before the inmost Penetralian doors,
Holding a cypress branch, the augur stands;
The King's firm foot strides echoeless the floors,
And with dull groan the temple veil expands;
Slow-moving on the brandish'd torches shine
Red o'er the wave that yawns behind the shrine:—

LVI.

Red o'er the wave, as, under vaulted rock,
Dark as Cocytus, the false smoothness flows;
But where the light fades—there is heard the shock
As hurrying down the headlong torrent goes;
With mocking oars—a raft sways, moored beside,
What keel save Charon's ploughs that dismal tide?

LVII.

Proud Arthur smiled upon the guileful host,
As welcome danger roused him and restor'd.—
"Friend," quoth the King, "methinks your streams might boast
A gentler margin and a fairer ford!"
"As birth to man," replied the priest, "the cave,
O guest, to thee! as death to man the wave.

LVIII.

"Doth it appall thee? thou canst yet return!
There love, there sunny life;—and yonder"—"Fame,
Cymri, and God!" said Arthur. "Paynim, learn
Death has two victors, deathless both—THE NAME,
THE SOUL;—to each a realm eternal given,
This rules the earth, and that achieves the heaven."

LIX.

He said and seized a torch with scornful hand;
The frail raft rock'd to his descending tread;
Upon the prow he fix'd the glowing brand,
And the raft drifted down the waves of dread.
So with his fortunes went confiding forth
The knightly Cæsar of the Christian North.

LX.

Then, from its shelter on his breast, the dove
Rose, and sail'd slow before with doubtful wing;
The dun mists rolling round the vaults above,
Below, the gulf with torch-fires crimsoning;
Wan through the glare, or white amidst the gloom,
Glanced Heaven's mute daughter with the silver plume.

LXI.

Meanwhile to Ægle: from the happier trance,
And from the stun of the first human ill
Labouring returns the soul!—As lightnings glance
O'er battle fields, with sated slaughter still,
The fitful reason flickering comes and goes
O'er the past struggle—o'er the blank repose.

LXII.

At length with one long, eager, searching look,
She gazed around, and all the living space
With one great loss seem'd lifeless!—then she strook
Her clench'd hand on her heart; and o'er her face
Settled ineffable that icy gloom,
Which only falls when hope abandons doom.

LXIII.

Why breaks the smile—why waves the exulting hand?
Why to the threshold moves that step serene?
The brow superb awes back the maiden band,
From the roused woman towers sublime the queen.
She pass'd the isle—and beam'd upon the crowd,
Bright as the May-moon when it bursts the cloud.

LXIV.

Brief and imperious rings her question; quick
A hundred hands point, answering to the fane,
As on she sweeps, behind her, fast and thick,
Gather the groups far following in her train.
Behind some bird unknown, of glorious dyes,
So swarm the meaner people of the skies.

LXV.

Oh the great force that sleeps in woman's heart!
She will, at least, behold that form once more;
See its last vestige from her world depart,
And mark the spot to haunt and wander o'er,
Rased in that impulse of the human breast
All the cold lessons on its leaves impress'd;—

LXVI.

Snapped in the strength of the divine desire
All the vain swathes with which convention thralls;—
Nature breaks forth, and at her breath of fire
The elaborate snow-pile's molten temple falls;
And meaner priestcrafts fly before that Truth,
Whose name is Passion, and whose altar, Youth!

LXVII.

Unknown the egress, dreamless of the snare,
Sole aim to look the last on the adored;
She gains the fane—she treads the aisle—and there
The deathlights guide her to the bridal lord;
On, through pale groups around the yawning cave,
She comes—and looks upon the livid wave.

LXVIII.

She comes—she sees afar, amidst the dark,
That fair, serene, undaunted, godlike brow—
Sees on the lurid deep the lonely bark
Drift through the circling horror;—sees, and now
On light's far verge it hovers, wanes, and fades,
As roars the hungering cataract up the shades.

LXIX.

Voiceless she look'd, and voiceless look'd and smiled
On her the priest; strange though the marvel seem,
The old man, childless, loved her more than child;
She link'd each thought—she coloured every dream;
But Love, the varying Genius, guides, in turn,
The soft to pity, to revenge the stern.

LXX.

Not his the sympathy which soothes the woe,
But that which, wrathful, feels, and shares, the wrong.
He in the faithless viewed alone the foe;
The weak he righted when he smote the strong;
In one dread crime a twofold virtue seen,
Here saved the land, and there avenged the queen.

LXXI.

So through the hush his hissing murmur stole—
"Ay, Ægle, blossom on the stem of kings,
Not to fresh altars glides the perjurer's soul,
Not to new maids the vows still thine he brings;
No rival mocks thee from the bloodless shore,
The dead, at least, are faithful evermore."

LXXII.

As when around the demigod of love,
Whom men Prometheus call, relentless fell
The flashing fires of Zeus, and Heaven above
Open'd in flame, in flame the opening hell;
While gazing dauntless on the Thunderer's frown,
Sunk from the Earth, the Earth's Light-bringer down;

LXXIII.

So, while both worlds before its sight lay bare,
And o'er one ruin burst the lightning shock,
Love, the Arch-Titan, in sublime despair,
Faced the rent Hades from the shattered rock;
And saw in Heaven, the future Heaven foreshown,
When Love shall reign where Force usurps the throne.

LXXIV.

The Woman heard, and gathering majesty
Beam'd on her front, and crown'd it with command;
The pale priest shrunk before her tranquil eye,
And the light touch of her untrembling hand—
"Enjoy," she said, with voice as clear as low,
"Enjoy thy hate; where love survives I go.

LXXV.

"Sweetly thou smilest—sweetly, gentle Death,
Kinder than life;—that severs, thou unitest!
To realms He spoke of goes this living breath,
A living soul, wherever space is brightest—
Fair Love—I trusted, now I claim, thy troth!
Blest be thy couch, for it hath room for both!"

LXXVI.

She said, and from each hand that would restrain
Broke, in the strength of her sublime despair;
Swift as the meteor on the northern main
Fades from the ice-lock'd sea-kings' livid stare—
She sprang; the robe a sudden glimmer gave,
And o'er the vision swept the closing wave.

LXXVII.

Return, wild Song, to Lancelot! Behold
Our Lord's lone house beside the placid mere!
There pipes the careless shepherd to his fold,
Or from the crags the shy capellæ peer
Through the green rents of many a hanging brake,
Which sends its quivering shadow to the lake.

LXXVIII.

And by the pastoral margins mournfully
Wanders from dawn to eve the earnest knight;
And ever to the ring he turns his eye,
And ever does the ring perplex the sight;
The fairy hand that knew no rest before,
Rests now as fix'd as if its task were o'er.

LXXIX.

Towards the far head of the calm water turn'd
The unmoving finger; yet, when gain'd the place,
No path for human foot the knight discern'd—
Abrupt and huge, the rocks enclosed the space.
His scath'd front veil'd in everlasting snows,
High above eagles Alpine Atlas rose.

LXXX.

No cleft! save that a giant torrent clove,
For its fierce hurry to the lake it fed;
Check'd for awhile in chasms conceal'd above,
Thence all its pomp the dazzling horror spread,
And from the beetling ridges, smooth and sheer,
Flash'd in one mass, down-roaring to the mere.

LXXXI.

Still to that spot the fairy hand inclined,
And daily there with wistful searching eyes
Wandered the knight; each day no path to find;
What step can scale that ladder to the skies?
What portals yawn in those relentless walls?—
Still the hand points where still the cataract falls.

LXXXII.

One noon, as thus he gazed in stern despair
On rock and torrent;—from the tortured spray,
And through the mists, into cerulean air,
A dove descending rush'd its arrowy way;
Swift as a falling star which, falling, brings
Woe on the helmet-crown of Dorian kings!*

* In moonless nights, every eighth year, the Spartan Ephors consulted the heavens; if there appeared the meteor, which we call the shooting star, they adjudged their kings to have committed some offence against the gods, and suspended them from their office till acquitted by the Delphic oracle, or Olympian priests.—PLUT. *Agis*, 11. MULLER'S *Dorians*, b. iii. c. 6.

LXXXIII.

Straight to the wanderer's hand bore down the bird,
With plumage crisp'd with fear, and piercing plaint;
Oft had he heedful, in his wanderings, heard
Of the great Wrong-Redresser, whom a saint
In the dove's guise directed—"Hail," he cried,
"I greet the token—I accept the guide!"

LXXXIV.

And sudden as he spoke, arose the wing,
(Warily veering towards the dexter flank
Of the huge chasm, through which leapt thundering
From Nature's heart her savage); on the bank
Of that fell stream, in root, and jag, and stone,
It traced the ladder to the glacier's throne.

LXXXV.

Slow sail'd the dove, and paused, and look'd behind,
As labouring after, crag on crag, the knight
(Close on the deafening roar, and whirling wind
Lash'd from the surges), through the vapourous night
Of the grey mists, loom'd up the howling wild;
Strong in the charm the fairy gave the child.

LXXXVI.

With bleeding hands, that leave a moment's red
On stone and stem wash'd by the mighty spray,
He gains at length the inter-alpine bed,
Whose lock'd Charybdis checks the torrent's way,
And forms a basin o'er abyssmal caves,
For the grim respite of the headlong waves.

LXXXVII.

Torrents below—the torrents still above!
Above less awful—as precipitous peak
And splinter'd ledge—and many a curve and cove
In the compress'd indented margins, break
That crushing sense of power, in which we see
What, without Nature's God, would Nature be!

LXXXVIII.

Before him, stretched the maëlstrom of the abyss;
And, in the central torrent, giant pines,
Uprooted from the bordering wilderness
By some gone winter's blast—in flashing lines
Shot through the whirl—then, pluck'd to the profound,
Vanish'd and rose, swift eddying round and round.

LXXXIX.

But on the marge as on the wave thou art,
O conquering Death!—what human, hueless face
Rests pillow'd on a silenced human heart?
What arm still clasps in more than love's embrace
That form for which yon vulture flaps its wing?
Kneel, Lancelot, kneel, thine eyes behold thy King!

XC.

Alas in vain—still in the Death-god's cave,
Ere yet the torrent snatch'd the hurrying stream,
Beside a crag grey-shimmering from the wave,
And near the brink by which the pallid beam
Show'd one pent path along the rugged verge,
By which to leave the raft and scape the surge,—

XCI.

Alas in vain, that haven to the ark
The dove had given!—just won the refuge-place,
When, thrice emerging from the sheeted dark,
White glanced a robe, and livid rose a face!
He saw, he sprang,—he near'd, he grasp'd the vest!
And *both* the torrent grappled to its breast.

XCII.

Yet, in the immense and superhuman force,
Love and despair bestow upon the bold,
The strong man battled with the Titan's course,
Grip'd rock and layer, and ledge, with snatching hold,
Bruised, bleeding, broken, onwards, downwards driven,
No wave his treasure from his grasp had riven.

XCIII.

Saved, saved—at last before his reeling eyes
(Into the pool, that check'd the Fury, hurl'd)
Shone, as he rose, through all the hurtling skies,
The dove's white wing; and ere the maëlstrom whirl'd
The maddened waters to the central shock,
Show'd the gnarl'd roots of the redeeming rock.

XCIV.

Less sense than instinct caught the wing that shone,
The crags that sheltered;—the wild billows gave
The failing limbs a force no more their own,
And as he turn'd and sunk, the swerving wave
Swooped round, dash'd on, and to the isthmus sped,
Still breast to breast, the living and the dead!

XCV.

Long vain were Lancelot's cares and knightly skill,
Ere, through slow veins congeal'd, pulsed back the blood;
The very wounds, the valour of the will,
The peaks that broke the fury of the flood
Had help'd to save; alas *the strong* to save!
For Strength to toil, till Love re-opes the grave.

XCVI.

Twice down the dismal path (the dove his guide)
The fairy nurseling bore his helpless load;
A chamois hunter in the vale descried,
Aided the convoy to the house of God.
Dark—wroth—convulsed, the earth-bound spirit lay;
Calm from the bier beside it, smiled the clay!

XCVII.

O Song—for Lydian elegy too stern,
Song, cradled in the Celt's rough battle-shield;
Rather from thee should man, the soldier, learn
To hide the wounds—heroic while conceal'd;
From foes without, the mean the palm may win,
What tries the noble is the war within!

XCVIII.

Let the King's woe its muse in Silence claim,
When sense return'd, and solitary life
Sate in the Shadow!—shade or sun the same,
Toil hath brief respite; man is made for strife,
Woman for rest!—rest, bright with dreams is given,
Child of the heathen, in the Christian heaven!

XCIX.

And to the Christian prince's plighted bride,
The simple monks the Christian's grave accord,
With lifted cross and swinging censer, glide
To passing bells—the hermits of the Lord;
And at that hour, in her own native vale,
Her own soft race their mystic loss bewail.

C.

Methinks I see the Tuscan Genius yet,
Lured, lingering by the clay it loved so well,
And listening to the two-fold dirge that met
In upper air;—here Nazarene anthems swell
Triumphal pæans!—there, the Alps behind,
Etrurian Næniæ,* load the lagging wind.

CI.

Pauses the startled Genius to compare
The notes that mourn the life, at best so brief,
With those that welcome to empyreal air
The bright escaper from a world of grief?
Marvelling what creed, beyond the happy vale,
Can teach the soul the loathëd Styx to hail!

THE ETRURIAN NÆNIÆ.

Where art thou, pale and melancholy ghost?
No funeral rites appease thy tombless clay;
Unburied, glidest thou by the dismal coast,
O exile from the day?

* Næniæ, the funeral hymns borrowed by the Romans from the Etrurians.

There, where the voice of love is heard no more,
Where the dull wave moans back the eternal wail,
Dost thou recall the summer suns of yore,
Thine own melodious vale?
Thy Lares stand on thy deserted floors,
And miss their last sweet daughter's holy face,
What hand shall wreathe with flowers the threshold doors?
What child renew the race?
Thine are the nuptials of the dreary shades,
Of all thy groves what rests?—the cypress tree!
As from the air a strain of music fades,
Dark silence buries thee!
Yet no, lost child of more than mortal sires,
Thy stranger bridegroom bears thee to his home,
Where the stars light the Æsars' nuptial fires
In Tina's azure dome;
From the fierce wave the god's celestial wing
Rapt thee aloft along the yielding air;
With amaranths fresh from heaven's eternal spring,
Bright Cupra* braids thy hair.
Ah, in those halls for us thou wilt not mourn,
Far are the Æsars' joys from human woe:
But not the less forsaken and forlorn
Those thou hast left below!
Never, oh never more, shall we behold thee,
The last spark dies upon the sacred hearth;
Art thou less lost, though heavenly arms enfold thee—
Art thou less lost to earth?
Slow swells the sorrowing Næniæ's chaunted strain,
Time with slow flutes our leaden footsteps keep;
Sad earth, whate'er the happier heaven may gain,
Hath but a loss to weep.

* Cupra, or Talna, corresponding with Juno, the nuptial goddess.

THE CHRISTIAN FUNERAL HYMN.

Sing we Halleluiah—singing
  Halleluiah to the Three;
Where, vain Death, oh, where thy stinging?
  Where, O Grave, thy victory?

As a sun a soul hath risen,
  Rising from a stormy main;
When the captive breaks the prison,
  Who, but slaves, would mourn the chain?

Fear for age subdued by trial,
  Heavy with the years of sin:
When the sunlight leaves the dial,
  And the solemn shades begin;—

Not for youth!—although the bosom
  With a sharper grief be wrung;
For the May wind strews the blossom,
  And the angel takes the young!

Saved from sins, while yet forgiven;—
  From the joys that lead astray,
From the earth at war with heaven,
  Soar, O happy soul, away!

From the human love that fadeth,
  In the falsehood or the tomb;
From the cloud that darkly shadeth;
  From the canker in the bloom;

Thou hast pass'd to suns unsetting,
  Where the rainbow spans the flood,
Where no moth the garb is fretting,
  Where no worm is in the bud.

Let the arrow leave the quiver,
It was fashion'd but to soar;
Let the wave pass from the river,
Into ocean evermore!

Mindful yet of mortal feeling
In thy fresh immortal birth;
By the Virgin Mother kneeling,
Plead for those beloved on earth.

Whisper them thou hast forsaken,
"Woe but borders unbelief;"
Comfort smiles in faith unshaken,
Shall thy glory be their grief?

Let one ray on them descending,
From the prophet Future stream;
Bliss is daylight never ending,
Sorrow but a passing dream.

O'er the grave in far communion,
With the choral Seraphim,
Chaunt in notes that hail reunion,
Chaunt the Christian's funeral hymn;—

Singing Halleluiah—singing
Halleluiah to the Three,
Where, vain Death, oh where thy stinging?
Where, O Grave, thy victory?

CII.

So rests the child of creeds before the Greek's,
In our Lord's holy ground—between the walls
Of the grey convent and the verdant creeks
Of the sequestered mere; afar the falls
Of the fierce torrent from her native vale,
Vex the calm wave, and groan upon the gale.

CIII.

Survives that remnant of old races still,
In its strange haven from the surge of Time?
There yet do Camsee's songs at sunset thrill,
At the same hour when here, the vesper chime
Hymns the sweet Mother? Ah, can granite gate,
Cataract, and Alp, exclude the steps of Fate?

CIV.

World-wearied man, thou knowest not on the earth
What regions lie beyond, yet near, thy ken!
But couldst thou find them, where would be the worth?
Life but repeats its triple tale to men.
Three truths unite the children of the sod—
All love—all suffer—and all feel a God!

CV.

By Ægle's grave, the royal mourner sate,
And from his bended eyes the veiling hand
Shut out the setting sun;—thus, desolate,
He sate, with Memory in her spirit-land,
And took no heed of Lancelot's soothing words,
Vain to the oak, bolt-shattered, sing the birds!

CVI.

Vain is their promise of returning spring;
Spring may give leaves, can spring reclose the core?
Comfort not sorrow—sorrow's self must bring
Its own stern cure!—All wisdom's holiest lore,
"The know thyself," descends from heaven in tears;
The cloud must break before the horizon clears.

CVII.

The dove forsook not:—now its poisèd wing,
Bath'd in the sunset, rested o'er the lake;
Now brooded o'er the grave beside the King;
Now with hush'd plumes, as if it feared to wake
Sleep, less serene than Death's, it sought his breast,
And o'er the heart of misery claimed its nest.

CVIII.

Night falls—the moon is at her full;—the mere
Shines with the sheen pellucid; not a breeze!
And through the hush'd and argent atmosphere
Sharp rise the summits of the breathless trees.
When Lancelot saw, all indistinct and pale,
Glide o'er the liquid glass a mistlike sail.

CIX.

Now, first from Arthur's dreams of fever gained,
And since (for grief unlocks the secret heart)
Briefly confess'd, the triple toil ordained
The knightly brother knew;—so with a start
He strained the eyes, to which a fairy gave
Vision of fairy forms, along the wave.

CX.

Then in his own the King's cold hand he took,
And spoke—"Arise, thy mission calls thee now!
Let the dead rest—still lives thy country!—look,
And nerve thy knighthood to redeem its vow.
This is the lake whose waves the falchion hide,
And yon the bark that becks thee to the tide!"

CXI.

The mourner listless rose, and looked abroad,
Nor saw the sail;—though nearer, clearer gliding,
The Fairy nurseling, by the vapoury shroud
And vapoury helm, beheld a phantom guiding.
"Not this," replied the King, "the lake decreed;
Where points thy hand, but floats a broken reed!

CXII.

"Where are the dangers on that placid tide?
Where are the fiends that guard the enchanted boon?
Behold, where rests the pilgrim's plumëd guide
On the cold grave—beneath the quiet moon!
So night gives rest to grief—with labouring day
Let the dove lead, and life resume, the way!"

CXIII.

Then answered Lancelot—for he was wise
In each mysterious Druid parable:—
"Oft in the things most simple to our eyes,
The real genii of our doom may dwell—
The enchanter spoke of trials to befall;
And the lone heart has trials worse than all!

CXIV.

"Weird triads tell us that our nature knows
In its own cells the demons it should brave;
And oft the calm of after glory flows
Clear round the marge of early passion's grave;"
And the dove came, ere Lancelot ceased to speak,
To its lord's hand—a leaflet in its beak,

CXV.

Pluck'd from the grave! Then Arthur's labouring thought
Recall'd the prophet words—and doubt was o'er;
He knew the lake that hid the boon he sought
Both by the grave, and by the herb it bore;
He took the bitter treasure from the dove,
And tasted Knowledge at the grave of Love,

CXVI.

And straight the film fell from his heavy eyes;
And, moored beside the marge, he saw the bark,
And, by the sails that swell'd in windless skies,
The phantom Lady in the robes of dark.
O'er moonlit tracks she stretched the shadowy hand,
And lo, beneath the waters bloomed the land!

CXVII.

Forests of emerald verdure spread below,
Through which proud columns glisten far and wide,
On to the bark the mourner's footsteps go;
The pale King stands by the pale phantom's side;
And Lancelot sprang—but sudden from his reach
Glanced the wan skiff, and left him on the beach.

CXVIII.

Chain'd to the earth by spells, more strong than love,
He saw the pinnace steal its noiseless way,
And on the mast there sate the steadfast dove,
With white plume shining in the steadfast ray—
Slow from the sight the airy vessel glides,
Till Heaven alone is mirror'd on the tides.

KING ARTHUR.

BOOK VI.

ARGUMENT.

Description of the Cymrian fire-beacons—Dialogue between Gawaine and Caradoc—The raven—Merlin announces to Gawaine that the bird selects him for the aid of the King—The knight's pious scruples—He yields reluctantly, and receives the raven as his guide—His pathetic farewell to Caradoc—He confers with Henricus on the propriety of exorcising the raven—Character of Henricus—The knight sets out on his adventures—The company he meets and the obligation he incurs—The bride and the sword—The bride's choice and the hound's fidelity—Sir Gawaine lies down to sleep under the fairy's oak—What there befalls him—The fairy banquet—The temptation of Sir Gawaine—The rebuke of the fairies—Sir Gawaine, much displeased with the raven, resumes his journey—His adventure with the Vikings, and how he comforts himself in his captivity.

BOOK VI.

I.

On the bare summit of the loftiest peak—
Crowning the hills round Cymri's Iscan home,
Rose the grey temple of the Faith Antique,
Before whose priests had paused the march of Rome,
When the Dark Isle revealed its drear abodes,
And the last Hades of Cimmerian gods;

II.

While dauntless Druids, by their shrines profan'd,
Stretch'd o'er the steel-clad hush their swordless hands,*
And dire Religion, horror-breathing, chain'd
The frozen eagles,—till the shuddering bands
Shamed into slaughter, broke the ghastly spell,
And, lost in reeks of carnage, sunk the hell.

III.

Quivered on column-shafts the poised rock,
As if a breeze could shake the ruin down;
But storm on storm had sent its thunder-shock,
Nor reft the temple of its mystic crown—
So awe of Power Divine on human breasts
Vibrates for ever, and for ever rests.

* See Tacitus, *l. xiv. cap.* 30, for the celebrated description of the attack on the Druids, in their refuge in Mona, under Publius Suetonius.

IV.

Within the fane awaits a giant pyre,
Around the pyre assembled warriors stand;
A pause of prayer;—and suddenly the fire
Flings its broad banner reddening o'er the land.
Shoot the fierce sparks and groan the crackling pines,
Toss'd on the Wave of Shields the glory shines.

V.

Lo, from dark night flash Carduel's domes of gold,
Glow the jagg'd rampires like a belt of light.
And to the stars springs up the dragon-hold,
With one lone image on the lonely height—
O'er those who saw a thrilling silence fell;
There, the still Prophet watch'd o'er Carduel!

VI.

Forth on their mission rush'd the wings of flame;
Hill after hill the land's grey warders rose;
First to the Mount of Bards the splendour came,
Wreath'd with large halo Trigarn's stern repose;
On, post by post, the fiery courier rode,
Blood red Edeirnion's dells of verdure glow'd;

VII.

Uprose the hardy men of Merioneth,
When, o'er the dismal strata parch'd and bleak,
Like some revived volcano's lurid breath
Sprang the fierce fire-jet from the herbless peak;
Flash'd down on meeting streams the Basalt walls,
In molten flame Rhaiadyr's thunder falls.

VIII.

Thy Faban Mount, Caernarvon, siezed the sign,
And pass'd the watchword to the Fairies' Hill;
All Mona blazed—as if the isle divine
To Bel, the sun-god, drest her altars still;
Menai reflects the prophet hues, and far
To twofold ocean knells the coming war.

IX.

Then wheeling round, the lurid herald swept
To quench the stars yet struggling with the glare,
Blithe to his task, resplendent Golcun leapt—
The bearded giant rose on Moel-y-Gaer—
Rose his six giant brothers,—Eifle rose,
And great Eryri lit his chasms of snows.

X.

So one vast altar was that father-land!
But nobler altars flash'd in souls of men,
Sublimer than the mountain-tops, the brand
Found pyres in every lowliest hamlet glen:
Soon on the rocks shall die the grosser fire—
Souls lit to freedom burn till suns expire.

XI.

Slowly the chiefs desert the blazing fane,
(Sure of steel-harvests from the dragon seed)
Descend the mountain and the walls regain;
As suns to systems, there to each decreed
His glorious task,—to marshall star on star,
And weave with fate the harmonious pomp of war.

XII.

Last of the noble conclave, lingered two;
Gawaine the mirthful, Caradoc the mild,
And, as the watchfires thicken'd on their view,
War's fearless playmate raised his hand and smiled,
Pointing to splendours, linking rock to rock;—
And while he smiled—sighed earnest Caradoc.

XIII.

"Now by my head—(an empty oath, and light!)
No taller tapers ever lit to rest
Rome's stately Cæsar;—sigh'st thou, at the sight,
For cost o'er-lavish, when so mean the guest?"
"Was it for this the gentle Saviour died?
Is Cain so glorious?" Caradoc replied.

XIV.

"Permit, Sir Bard, an argument on that,"
True to his fame, said golden-tongued Gawaine,
"The hawk may save his fledgelings from the cat,
Nor yet deserve comparisons with Cain;
And Abel's fate, to hands unskilled, proclaims
The use of practice in gymnastic games.

XV.

"Woes that have been are wisdom's lesson-books—
From Abel's death, the men of peace should learn
To add an inch of iron to their crooks
And strike, when struck, a little in return—
Had Abel known his quarterstaff, I wot,
Those Saxon Ap-Cains ne'er had been begot!"

XVI.

More had he said, but a strange, grating note,
Half laugh—half croak, was here discordant heard;
An *ave* rose—but died within his throat,
As close before him perch'd the enchanter's bird,
With head aslant, and glittering eye askew,
It near'd the knight—the knight in haste withdrew.

XVII.

"All saints defend me, and excuse a jest!"
Muttered Sir Gawaine—"bird or fiend avaunt:
Oh, holy Abel, let this matter rest,
I do repent me of my foolish taunt!"
With that the cross upon his sword he kist,
And stared aghast—the bird was on his wrist.

XVIII.

"Hem—*vade Satanas!—discede!—retro,*"
The raven croak'd, and fix'd himself afresh;
"*Avis damnata!—salus sit in Petro,*"
Ten pointed claws here fasten'd on his flesh;
The knight, sore smarting, shook his arm—the bird
Peck'd in reproach, and kept its perch unstirr'd.

XIX.

Quoth Caradoc—whose time had come to smile,
And smile he did in grave and placid wise—
"Let not thine evil thoughts, my friend, defile
The harmless wing descended from the skies."
"Skies!!!" said the knight—"black imps from skies descend
With claws like these!—the world is at an end!"

XX.

"Now shame, Gawaine, O knight of little heart,
How, if a small and inoffensive raven
Dismay thee thus, couldst thou have track'd the chart
By which Æneas won his Alban-haven?
On Harpies, Scylla, Cerberus, reflect—
And undevour'd—rejoice to be but peckt."

XXI.

"True," said a voice behind them,—"gentle bard,
In life as verse, the art is—to compare."
Gawaine turn'd short, gazed keenly, and breathed hard
As on the dark-robed magian streamed the glare
Of the huge watchfire—"Prophet," quoth Gawaine,
"My friend scorns pecking—let him try the pain!

XXII.

"Please to call back this—offspring of the skies!
Unworthy I to be his earthly rest!"
"Methought," said Merlin, "that thy King's emprize
Had found in thine a less reluctant breast;
Again is friendship granted to his side—
Thee the bird summons, be the bird thy guide."

XXIII.

Dumb stared the knight—stared first upon the seer,
Then on the raven,—who, demure and sly,
Turn'd on his master a respectful ear,
And on Gawaine a magisterial eye.
"What hath a king with ravens, seer, to do?"
"Odin the king of half the world had two.

XXIV.

"Peace—if thy friendship answer to its boast,
Arm, take thy steed and with the dawn depart—
The bird will lead thee to the ocean coast;
Strange are thy trials, stalwart be thy heart."
"Seer," quoth Gawaine, "my heart I hope is tough
Nor needs a prop from this portentous chough.

XXV.

"You know the proverb—'birds of the same feather,'
A proverb much enforced in penal laws,*
In certain quarters were we seen together
It might, I fear, suffice to damn my cause:
You cite examples apt and edifying—
Odin kept ravens!—well, and Odin's frying!"

XXVI.

The enchanter smiled, in pity or in scorn;
The smile was sad, but lofty, calm, and cold—
"The straws," he said, "on passing winds upborne
Dismay the courser—is the man more bold?
Dismiss thy terrors, go thy ways, my son,
To do thy duty is the fiend to shun.

XXVII.

"Not for thy sake the bird is given to thee,
But for thy King's."—"Enough," replied the knight,
And bow'd his head. The bird rose jocundly,
Spread its dark wing and rested in the light—
"Sir Bard," to Caradoc the chosen said
In the close whisper of a knight well bred:

* In Welch laws it was sufficient to condemn a person to be found with notorious offenders.

XXVIII.

"Vow'd to my King—come man, come fiend, I go,
But ne'er expect to see thy friend again,
That bird carnivorous hath designs I know
Most Anthropophagous on doom'd Gawaine;
I leave you all the goods that most I prize—
Three steeds, six hawks, four gre-hounds, two blue eyes.

XXIX.

"Beat back the Saxons—beat them well, my friend,
And when they're beaten, and your hand's at leisure,
Set to your harp a ditty on my end—
The most appropriate were the shortest measure:
Forewarn'd by me all light discourses shun,
And mostly—jests on Adam's second son."

XXX.

He said, and wended down the glowing hill.
Long watch'd the minstrel with a wistful gaze,
Then join'd the musing seer—and both were still,
Still mid the ruins—girded with the rays;
Twin heirs of light and lords of time, grey Truth
That ne'er is young—and Song the only youth.

XXXI.

At dawn Sir Gawaine through the postern stole,
But first he sought one reverend friend—a bishop,
By him assoil'd and shrived, he felt his soul
Too clean for cooks that fry for fiends to dish up;
And then suggested, lighter and elater,
To cross the raven with some holy water.

XXXII.

Henricus—so the prelate sign'd his name—
Was lord high chancellor in things religious;
With him church militant in truth became
(*Nam cedant arma togæ*) church litigious;
He kept his deacons notably in awe
By flowers epistolar perfumed with law.

XXXIII.

No man more stern, more *fortiter in re,*
No man more mild, more *suaviter in modo;*
When knots grew tough, it was sublime to see
Such polished sheers go clippingly *in nodo:*
A hand so supple, pliant, glib, and quick,
Ne'er smooth'd a band, nor burn'd a heretic.

XXXIV.

He seem'd to turn to you his willing cheek,
And beg you not to smite too hard the other;
He seized his victims with a smile so meek,
And wept so fondly o'er his erring brother,
No wolf more righteous on a lamb could sup,
You vex'd his stream—he grieved—and eat you up.

XXXV.

"Son," said Henricus, "what you now propose
Is wise and pious—fit for a beginning;
But sinful things, I fear me, but disclose,
In sin, perverted appetite for sinning;
Hopeless to cure—we only can detect it,
First cross the bird and then (he groaned) *dissect it!*"

XXXVI.

Till now, the raven perch'd on Gawaine's chair
Had seem'd indulging in a placid doze,
And if he heard, he seem'd no jot to care
For threats of sprinkling his demoniac clothes,
But when the priest the closing words let drop
He hopp'd away as fast as he could hop.

XXXVII.

Gain'd a safe corner, on a pile of tomes,
Tracts against Arius—bulls against Pelagius,
The church of Cymri's controverse with Rome's—
Those fierce materials seem'd to be contagious,
For there, with open beak and glowering eye,
The bird seem'd croaking forth, "Dissect me! try!"

XXXVIII.

This sight, perchance, the prelate's pious plan
Relax'd; he gazed, recoil'd, and faltering said,
"'Tis clear the monster is the foe of man,
His beak how pointed! and his eyes how red!
Demons are spirits;—spirits, on reflexion,
Are forms phantasmal, that defy dissection."

XXXIX.

"Truly," sigh'd Gawaine, "but the holy water!"
"No," cried the Prelate, "ineffective here.
Try, but not now, a simple *noster-pater*,
Or chaunt a hymn. I dare not interfere;
Act for yourself—and say your catechism;
Were I to meddle, it would cause a schism."

XL.

"A schism!"—"The church, though always in the right,
Holds two opinions, both extremely able;
This makes the rubric rest on gowns of white,
That makes the church itself depend on sable;
Were I to exorcise that raven-back
'T would favour white, and raise the deuce in black.*

XLI.

"Depart my son—at once, depart, I pray,
Pay up your dues, and keep your mind at ease,
And call that creature—no, the other way—
When fairly out, a *credo*, if you please;—
Go,—*pax vobiscum*;—shut the door I beg,
And stay;—On Friday, flogging,—with an egg!"

XLII.

Out went the knight, more puzzled than before;
And out, unsprinkled, flew the Stygian bird;
The bishop rose, and doubly locked the door;
His pen he mended, and his fire he stirr'd;
Then solved that problem—"Pons Diaconorum,"
White equals black, plus x y botherorum.

* If the celebrated controversy between Black and White which divided the Cymrian church in King Arthur's days, should seem to suggest a parallel instance in our own,—the Author begs sincerely to say that he is more inclined to grieve than to jest at a schism which threatens to separate from so large a body of the upholders of the English church, the abilities and learning of no despicable portion of the English clergy. There is a division more dangerous than that between theologian and theologian—*viz.*, a division between the Pastors and their flocks—between the teaching of the pulpit and the sympathy of the audience. Far from the Author be the rash presumption to hazard any opinion as to matters of doctrine, on which—such as Regeneration by Baptism—it cannot be expected that, for the sake of expediency or even concord, the remarkable thinkers who have emerged from the schools of Oxford should admit of compromise;—but he asks, with the respect due to zeal and erudition, whether it be worth while to inflame dispute, and risk congregations—for the colour of a gown?

XLIII.

So through the postern stole the troubled knight;
Still as he rode, from forest, mount, and vale,
Rung lively horns, and in the morning light
Flash'd the sheen banderoll, and the pomp of mail,
The welcome guests of War's blithe festival,
Keen for the feast, and summoned to the hall.

XLIV.

Curt answer gave the knight to greeting gay,
And none to taunt from scurril churl unkind,
Oft asking, 'if he did mistake the way?'—
Or hinting, 'war was what he left behind;'
As noon came on, such sights and comments cease,
Lone through the pastures rides the knight in peace.

XLV.

Grave as a funeral mourner rode Gawaine—
The bird went first in most indecent glee,
Now lost to sight, now gamb'ling back again—
Now munch'd a beetle, and now chaced a bee—
Now pluck'd the wool from meditative lamb,
Now pick'd a quarrel with a lusty ram.

XLVI.

Sharp through his vizor, Gawaine watch'd the thing,
With dire misgivings at that impish mirth:
Day wax'd—day waned—and still the dusky wing
Seem'd not to find one resting place on earth.
"Saints," groaned Gawaine, "have mercy on a sinner,
And move that devil—just to stop for dinner!"

XLVII.

The bird turn'd round, as if it understood,
Halted the wing, and seem'd awhile to muse;—
Then dives at once into a dismal wood,
And grumbling much, the hungry knight pursues,
To hear (and hearing, hope once more revives,)
Sweet-clinking horns, and gently-clashing knives.

XLVIII.

An opening glade a pleasant group displays;
Ladies and knights amidst the woodland feast;
Around them, reinless, steed and palfrey graze;
To earth leaps Gawaine—"I shall dine at least."
His casque he doffs—"Good knights and ladies fair,
Vouchsafe a famish'd man your feast to share."

XLIX.

Loud laugh'd a big, broad-shouldered, burly host;
"On two conditions, eat thy fill," quoth he;
"Before one dines, 'tis well to know the cost—
Thou'lt wed my daughter, and thou'lt fight with me."
"Sir Host," said Gawaine, as he stretched his platter,
"I'll first the pie discuss, and then—the matter."

L.

The ladies looked upon the comely knight,
His arch bright eye provoked the smile it found;
The men admired that vasty appetite,
Meet to do honour to the Table Round;
The host, reseated, sent the guest his horn,
Brimm'd with pure drinks distill'd from barley corn.

LI.

Drinks rare in Cymri, true to milder mead,
But long familiar to Milesian lays,
So huge that draught, it had dispatch'd with speed
Ten Irish chiefs in these degenerate days:
Sir Gawaine drained it, and Sir Gawaine laugh'd,
"Cool is your drink, though scanty is the draught;

LII.

"But, pray you pardon, (sir, a slice of boar,)
Judged by your accent, mantles, beards, and wine,
(If wine this be) ye come from HUERDAN's* shore,
To aid no doubt our kindred Celtic line;
Ye saw the watch-fires on our hills at night
And march to Carduel? read I, sirs, aright?"

LIII.

"Stranger," replied the host, "your guess is wrong,
And shews your lack of history and reflection;
Huerdan with Cymri is allied too long,
We come, my friend, to sever the connexion:
But first, (your bees are wonderful for honey,)
Yield us your hives—in plainer words your money."

LIV.

"Friend," said the golden-tongued Gawaine, "methought
Your mines were rich in wealthier ore than ours."
"True," said the host, superbly, "were they wrought!
But shall Milesians waste in work their powers?
Base was that thought, the heartless insult masking."
"Faith," said Gawaine, "gold's easier got by asking."

* HUERDAN, *i. e.* Ireland, pronounced, in the Poem, as a dissyllable.

LV.

Upsprung the host, upsprung the guests in ire—
Upsprung the gentle dames, and fled affrighted;
High rose the din, than all the din rose higher
The croak of that curs'd raven quite delighted;
Sir Gawaine finished his last slice of boar,
And said "Good friends, more business and less roar.

LVI.

"If you want peace—shake hands, and peace, I say,
If you want fighting, gramercy! we 'll fight."
"Ho," cried the host, "your dinner you must pay—
The two conditions."—"Host, you 're in the right,
To fight I'm willing, but to wed I'm loth;
I choose the first."—"Your word is bound to *both:*

LVII.

"Me first engaged, if conquered you are—dead,
And then alone your honour is acquitted;
But conquer me, and then you must be wed;
You ate!—the contract in that act admitted."
"Host," cried the knight, half stunned by all the clatter,
"I only said I would discuss the matter.

LVIII.

"But if your faith upon my word reposed,
That thought alone King Arthur's knight shall bind."
Few moments more, and host and guest had closed—
For blows come quick when folks are so inclined:
They foined, they fenced, changed play, and hack'd and hewed—
Paused, panted, eyed each other, and renew'd;

LIX.

At length a dexterous and back-handed blow,
Clove the host's casque and bow'd him to his knee.
"Host," said the Cymrian to his fallen foe;
"But for thy dinner, wolves should dine on thee;
Yield—thou bleed'st badly—yield and ask thy life."
"Content," the host replied—"embrace thy wife!"

LX.

"O cursed bird," cried Gawaine, with a groan,
"To what fell trap my wretched feet were carried!
My darkest dreams had ne'er this fate foreshown—
I sate to dine, I rise—and I am married!
O worse than Esau, miserable elf,
He sold his birthright—but he kept himself."

LXI.

While thus in doleful and heart-rending strain
Mourned the lost knight, the host his daughter led,
Placed her soft hand in that of sad Gawaine—
"Joy be with both!"—the bridegroom shook his head!
"I have a castle which I won by force—
Mount, happy man, for thither wends our course:

LXII.

"Page, bind my scalp—to broken scalps we 're used.
Your bride, brave son, is worthy of your merit;
No man alive has Erin's maids accused,
And least *that* maiden, of a want of spirit;
She plies a sword as well as you, fair sir,
When out of hand, just try your hand on her."

LXIII.

Not once Sir Gawaine lifts his leaden eyes,
To mark the bride by partial father praised,
But mounts his steed—the gleesome raven flies
Before; beside him rides the maid amazed:
"Sir Knight" said she at last, with clear loud voice,
"I hope your musings do not blame your choice?"

LXIV.

"Damsel," replied the knight of golden tongue,
As with some effort he replied at all,
"Sith our two skeins in one the Fates have strung,
My thoughts were guessing when the shears would fall;
Much irks it me, lest vowed to toil and strife,
I doom a widow where I make a wife.

LXV.

"And sooth to say, despite those matchless charms
Which well might fire our last new saint, Dubricius,
To morrow's morn must snatch me from thine arms;
Led to far lands by auguries, not auspicious—
Wise to postpone a bond, how dear soever,
Till my return."—"Return! that may be never:

LXVI.

"What if you fall? (since thus you tempt the fates)
The yew will flourish where the lily fades;
The laidliest widows find consoling mates
With far less trouble than the comeliest maids;
Wherefore, Sir Husband, have a cheerful mind,
Whate'er may chance your wife will be resign'd."

LXVII.

That loving comfort, arguing sense discreet,
But coldly pleased the knight's ungrateful ear,
But while devising still some vile retreat,
The trumpets flourish and the walls frown near;
Just as the witching night begins to fall
They pass the gates and enter in the hall.

LXVIII.

Soon in those times primæval came the hour
When balmy sleep did wasted strength repair,
They led Sir Gawaine to the lady's bower,
Unbraced his mail and left him with the fair;
Then first, demurely seated side by side,
The dolorous bridegroom gazed upon the bride.

LXIX.

No iron heart had he of golden tongue,
To beauty none by nature were politer;
The bride was tall and buxom, fresh and young,
And while he gazed, his tearful eyes grew brighter—
"'For good, for better,' runs the sacred verse,
Sith now no better—let me brave the worse."

LXX.

With that he took and kiss'd the lady's hand,
The lady smiled and Gawaine's heart grew bolder,
When from the roof by some unseen command
Flash'd down a sword and smote him on the shoulder—
The knight leapt up, sore-bleeding from the stroke,
While from the lattice cawed the merriest croak!

LXXI.

Aghast he gazed—the sword within the roof
Again had vanished; nought was to be seen—
He felt his shoulder, and remain'd aloof.
"Fair dame," quoth he, "explain what this may mean."
The bride replied not, hid her face and wept;
Slow to her side, with caution, Gawaine crept.

LXXII.

"Nay, weep not, sweetheart, but a scratch—no more,"
He bent to kiss the dewdrops from his rose,
When presto down the glaive enchanted shore—
Gawaine leapt back in time to save his nose.
"Ah, cruel father," groan'd the lady then,
"I hoped at least thou wert content with ten!"

LXXIII.

"Ten what?" said Gawaine.—"Gallant knights like thee,
Who fought and conquer'd my deceitful sire;
Married, as thou, to miserable me,
And doom'd, as thou, beneath the sword to expire—
By this device he gains their arms and steeds,
So where force fails him, there the fraud succeeds."

LXXIV.

"Foul felon host," the wrathful knight exclaims,
"Foul wizard bird, no doubt in league with him!
Have they no dread lest all good knights and dames
Save fiends their task, and rend them limb from limb?
But thou for Gawaine ne'er shalt be a mourner,
Thou keep the couch, and I—yon farthest corner!"

LXXV.

This said, the prudent knight on tiptoe stealing
Went from his bride as far as he could go,
Then laid him down, intent upon the ceiling;
Noses, once lost, no second crop will grow—
So watch'd Sir Gawaine, so the lady wept,
Perch'd on the lattice-sill the raven slept.

LXXVI.

Blithe rose the sun, and blither still Gawaine;
Steps climb the stair, a hand unbars the door—
"Saints," cries the host, and stares upon the twain,
Amazed to see that living guest once more—
"Did you sleep well?"—"Why, yes," replied the knight,
"One gnat, indeed;—but gnats were made to bite.

LXXVII.

"Man must leave insects to their insect law;—
Now thanks, kind host, for board and bed and all—
Depart I must,"—the raven gave a caw.
"And I with thee," chimed in that damsel tall.
"Nay," said Gawaine, "I wend on ways of strife,"
"Sir, hold your tongue—I choose it; I'm your wife."

LXXVIII.

With that the lady took him by the hand,
And led him, fall'n of crest, adown the stair;
Buckled his mail, and girded on his brand,
Brimm'd full the goblet nor disdain'd to share—
The host saith nothing, or to knight or bride;
Forth comes the steed—a palfrey by its side.

LXXIX.

Then Gawaine flung from the untasted board
His manchet to a hound with hungry face;
Sprung to his selle, and wish'd, too late, that sword
Had closed his miseries with a *coup de grace.*
They clear the walls, the open road they gain;
The bride rode dauntless—daunted much Gawaine.

LXXX.

Gaily the fair discoursed on many things,
But most on those ten lords—his time before,
Unhappy wights, who, as old Homer sings,
Had gone, 'Proiapsoi,' to the Stygian shore;
Then, each described and praised,—she smiled and said,
"But one live dog is worth ten lions dead."

LXXXI.

The knight prepared that proverb to refute,
When the bird beckoned down a delving lane,
And there the bride provoked a new dispute:
That path was frightful—she preferred the plain.
"Dame," said the knight, "not I your steps compel—
Take thou the plain!—adieu! I take the dell."

LXXXII.

"Ah, cruel lord," with gentle voice and mien
The lady murmur'd, and regained his side;
"Little thou know'st of woman's faith, I ween,
All paths alike save those that would divide;
Ungrateful knight—too dearly loved!"—"But then,"
Falter'd Gawaine, "you said the same to *ten!*"

LXXXIII.

"Ah no; their deaths alone their lives endeared,
Slain for my sake, as I could die for thine;"
And while she spoke so lovely she appeared
The knight did, blissful, towards her cheek incline—
But, ere a tender kiss his thanks could say,
A strong hand jerked the palfrey's neck away.

LXXXIV.

Unseen till then, from out the bosky dell
Had leapt a huge, black-brow'd, gigantic wight;
Sudden he swung the lady from her selle,
And siezed that kiss defrauded from the knight,
While, with loud voice and gest uncouth, he swore
So fair a cheek he ne'er had kiss'd before!

LXXXV.

With mickle wrath Sir Gawaine sprang from steed,
And, quite forgetful of his wonted parle,
He did at once without a word proceed
To make a ghost of that presuming carle.
The carle, nor ghost nor flesh inclined to yield,
Took to his club, and made the bride his shield.

LXXXVI.

"Hold, stay thine hand!" the hapless lady cried,
As high in air the knight his falchion rears;
The carle his laidly jaws distended wide,
And—"Ho," he laughed, "for me the sweet one fears,
Strike, if thou durst, and pierce two hearts in one,
Or yield the prize—by love already won."

LXXXVII.

In high disdain, the knight of golden tongue
Looked this way, that, revolving where to smite;
Still as he looked, and turned, the giant swung
The unknightly buckler round from left to right.
Then said the carle—"What need of steel and strife?
A word in time may often save a life.

LXXXVIII.

"This lady me prefers, or I mistake,
Most ladies like an honest hearty wooer;
Abide the issue, she her choice shall make;
Dare you, sir rival, leave the question to her?
If so, resheathe your sword, remount your steed,
I loose the lady, and retire."—"Agreed,"

LXXXIX.

Sir Gawaine answered—sure of the result,
And charmed the fair so cheaply to deliver;
But ladies' hearts are hidden and occult,
Deep as the sea, and changeful as the river.
The carle released the fair, and left her free—
"Caw," said the raven, from the willow tree.

XC.

A winsome knight all know was fair Gawaine
(No knight more winsome shone in Arthur's court:)
The carle's rough features were of homeliest grain,
As shaped by Nature in burlesque and sport;
The lady looked and mused, and scanned the two,
Then made her choice—the carle had spoken true.

XCI.

The knight forsaken, rubbed astounded eyes,
Then touch'd his steed and slowly rode away—
"Bird," quoth Gawaine, as on the raven flies,
"Be peace between us, from this blessed day;
One single act has made me thine for life,—
Thou hast shown the path by which I lost a wife!"

XCII.

While thus his grateful thought Sir Gawaine vents,
He hears, behind, the carle's Stentorian cries;
He turns, he pales, he groans—"The carle repents!
No, by the saints, he keeps her or he dies!"
Here at his stirrups stands the panting wight—
"The lady's hound, restore the hound, sir knight."

XCIII.

"The hound," said Gawaine, much relieved, "what hound?"
And then perceived he that the dog he fed,
With grateful steps the kindly guest had found,
And there stood faithful.—"Friend," Sir Gawaine said,
"What's just is just! the dog must have his due,
The dame had hers, to choose between the two."

XCIV.

The carle demurred; but justice was so clear,
He'd nought to urge against the equal law;
He calls the hound, the hound disdains to hear,
He nears the hound, the hound expands his jaw;
The fangs were strong and sharp, that jaw within,
The carle drew back—"Sir knight, I fear you win."

XCV.

"My friend," replies Gawaine, the ever bland,
"I took thy lesson, in return take mine;
All human ties, alas, are ropes of sand,
My lot to-day to-morrow may be thine;
But never yet the dog our bounty fed,
Betrayed the kindness or forgot the bread.*"

XCVI.

With that the courteous hand he gravely waived,
Nor deemed it prudent longer to delay;
Tempt not the reflow, from the ebb just saved!
He spurred his steed, and vanished from the way.
Sure of rebuke, and troubled in his mind,
An altered man, the carle his fair rejoined.

XCVII.

That day the raven led the knight to dine
Where merry monks spread no abstemious board;
Dainty the meat, and delicate the wine,
Sir Gawaine felt his sprightlier self restored;
When towards the eve the raven croaked anew,
And spread the wing for Gawaine to pursue.

XCVIII.

With clouded brow the pliant knight obeyed,
And took his leave, and quaffed his stirrup cup;
And briskly rode he thorough glen and glade,
Till the fair moon, to speak in prose, was up;
Then to the raven, now familiar grown,
He said—"Friend bird, night's made for sleep, you'll own,

* The whole of that part of Sir Gawaine's adventures which includes the incidents of the sword and the hound, is borrowed (with alterations) from one of LE GRAND'S *Fabliaux*.

XCIX.

"This oak presents a choice of boughs for you,
For me a curtain and a grassy mound."
Straight to the oak the obedient raven flew,
And croak'd with merry, yet malignant sound.
The luckless knight thought nothing of the croak,
And laid him down beneath the Fairy's Oak.

C.

Of evil fame was Nannau's antique tree,
Yet styled "the hollow oak of demon race;"*
But blithe Gwyn ab Nudd's elphin family
Were the gay demons of the slandered place;
And ne'er in scene more elphin, near and far,
On dancing fairies glanced the smiling star.

CI.

Whether thy chafing torrents, rock-born Caine,
Flash through the delicate birch and glossy elm,
Or prison'd Mawddach† clangs his triple chain
Of waters, fleeing to the happier realm,
Where his course broad'ning smiles along the land;—
So souls grow tranquil as their thoughts expand.

CII.

High over subject vales the brow serene
Of the lone mountain look'd on moonlit skies;
Wide glades far opening into swards of green,
With shimmering foliage of a thousand dies,
And tedded tufts of heath, and ivied boles
Of trees, and wild flowers, scenting bosky knolls.

* In the domain of Nannau (which now belongs to the Vaughans) was standing to within a period comparatively recent, the legendary oak called Derwen Ceubren yr Ellyll —the hollow oak, the haunt of demons.

† Mawddach, with its three waterfalls.

CIII.

And herds of deer as slight as Jura's roe,*
Or Iran's shy gazelle, on sheenest places,
Grouped still, or flitted the far allies thro';
The fairy quarry for the fairy chaces;
Or wheel'd the bat, brushing o'er brake and scaur,
Lured by the moth, as lures the moth the star.

CIV.

Sir Gawaine slept—Sir Gawaine slept not long,
His ears were tickled, and his nose was tweaked;
Light feet ran quick his stalwart limbs along,
Light fingers pinch'd him, and light voices squeak'd.
He op'd his eyes, the left and then the right,
Fair was the scene, and hideous was his fright!

CV.

The tiny people swarm around, and o'er him,
Here on his breast they lead the morris dance,
There, in each ray diagonal before him,
They wheel, leap, pirouette, caper, shoot askance,
Climb row on row each other's pea-green shoulder,
And point, and mow upon the shock'd beholder.

CVI.

And some had faces lovelier than Cupido's,
With rose-bud lips, all dimpling o'er with glee;
And some had brows as ominous as Dido's,
When Ilion's pious traitor put to sea;
Some had bull heads, some lions', but in small,
And some (the finer drest) no heads at all.

* The deer in the park of Nannau are singularly small.

CVII.

By mortal dangers scared, the wise resort
To means fugacious, *licet et licebit;*
But he who settles in a fairy's court,
Loses that option, *sedet et sedebit;*
Thrice Gawaine strove to stir, nor stirred a jot,
Charms, cramps, and torments nailed him to the spot.

CVIII.

Thus of his limbs deprived, the ingenious knight
Straightway betook him to his golden tongue—
"Angels," quoth he, "or fairies, with delight
I see the race my friends the bards have sung;
Much honoured that, in any way expedient,
You make a ball-room of your most obedient."

CIX.

Floated a sound of laughter, musical—
As when in summer noon, melodious bees
Cluster o'er jasmine roofs, or as the fall
Of silver bells, on the Arabian breeze;
What time with chiming feet in palmy shades
Move, round the softened Moor, his Georgian maids.

CX.

Forth from the rest there stepped a princely fay—
"And well, sir mortal, dost thou speak," quoth he,
"We elves are seldom froward to the gay,
Rise up, and welcome to our companie."
Sir Gawaine won his footing with a spring,
Low bowed the knight, as low the fairy king.

CXI.

"By the bright diadem of dews congeal'd,
And purple robe of pranksome butterfly,
Your royal rank," said Gawaine, "is reveal'd,
Yet more, methinks, by your majestic eye;
Of kings with mien august I know but two,
Men have their Arthur,—happier fairies, you."

CXII.

"Methought," replied the elf, "thy first accost
Proclaimed thee one of Arthur's peerless train;
Elsewhere alas!—our later age hath lost
The blithe good-breeding of King Saturn's reign,
When, some four thousand years ago, with Fauns,
We Fays made merry on Arcadian lawns.

CXIII.

"Time flees so fast it seems but yesterday!
And life is brief for fairies as for men."
"Ha," said Gawaine, "can fairies pass away?"
"Pass like the mist on Arran's wave, what then?
At least we're young as long as we survive;
Our years six thousand—I have numbered five.

CXIV.

"But we have stumbled on a dismal theme,
As always happens when one meets a man—
Ho! stop that zephyr!—Robin, catch that beam!
And now my friend, we'll feast it while we can."
The moonbeam halts, the zephyr bows his wing,
Light through the leaves the laughing people spring.

CXV.

Then Gawaine felt as if he skirr'd the air,
His brain grew dizzy, and his breath was gone;
He stopped at last, and such inviting fare
Never plump monk set lustful eyes upon.
Wild sweet-briars girt the banquet, but the brake
Oped where in moonlight rippled Bala's lake.

CXVI.

Such dainty cheer—such rush of revelry—
Such silver laughter—such arch happy faces—
Such sportive quarrels from excess of glee—
Hush'd up with such sly innocent embraces,
Might well make *twice* six thousand years appear
To elfin minds a sadly nipped career!

CXVII.

The banquet o'er, the royal Fay intent
To do all honour to King Arthur's knight,
Smote with his rod the bank on which they leant,
And Fairy-land flash'd glorious on the sight;
Flash'd, through a silvery, soft, translucent mist,
The opal shafts and domes of amethyst;

CXVIII.

Flash'd founts in shells of pearl, which chrystal walls
And phosphor lights of myriad hues redouble;
There, in the blissful subterranean halls,
When morning wakes the world of human trouble,
Glide the gay race; each sound our discord knows,
Faint-heard above, but lulls them to repose.

CXIX.

O Gawaine, blush! Alas! that gorgeous sight,
But woke the latent mammon in the man,
While fairy treasures shone upon the knight,
His greedy thoughts on lands and castles ran;
He stretch'd his hands, he felt the fingers itch,
"Sir Fay," quoth he, "you must be monstrous rich!"

CXX.

Scarce fall the words from those unlucky lips,
Than down rush'd darkness, flooding all the place;
His feet a fairy in a twinkling trips;
The angry winglets swarm upon his face;
Pounce on their prey the tiny torturers flew,
And sang this moral while they pinch'd him blue:

CHORUS OF PREACHING FAIRIES.

Joy to him who fairy treasures
With a fairy's eye can see;
Woe to him who counts and measures
What the worth in coin may be.

Gems from withered leaves we fashion
For the spirit pure from stain;
Grasp them with a sordid passion,
And they turn to leaves again.

CHORUS OF PINCHING FAIRIES.

Here and there, and every where,
Tramp and cramp him inch by inch;
Fair is fair,—to each his share,
You shall preach and we will pinch.

CHORUS OF PREACHING FAIRIES.

Fairy treasures are not rated
By their value in the mart;
In thy bosom, Earth, created
For the coffers of the heart.

Dost thou covet fairy money?
Rifle but the blossom bells—
Like the wild bee, shape the honey
Into golden cloister-cells.

CHORUS OF PINCHING FAIRIES.

Spirit hear it, flesh revere it!
Stamp the lesson inch by inch!
Rightly merit, flesh and spirit,
This the preaching, that the pinch!

CHORUS OF PREACHING FAIRIES.

Wretched mortal, once invited,
Fairy land was thine at will;
Every little star had lighted
Revels when the world was still.

Every bank a gate had granted
To the topaz-paven halls—
Every wave had roll'd enchanted,
Chiming from our music-falls.

CHORUS OF PINCHING FAIRIES.

Round him winging, sharp and stinging,
Clip him, nip him, inch by inch,
Sermons singing, wisdom bringing,
Point the moral with a pinch.

CHORUS OF PREACHING FAIRIES.

Now the spell is lost for ever,
And the common earth is thine;
Count the traffic on the river,
Weigh the ingots in the mine;

Look around, aloft, and under,
With an eye upon the cost;
Gone the happy world of wonder!
Woe, thy fairy land is lost!

CHORUS OF PINCHING FAIRIES.

Nature bare is, where thine air is,
Custom cramps thee inch by inch,
And when care is, human fairies
Preach and—vanish, at a pinch!

CXXI.

Sudden they cease—for shrill crow'd chanticleer;
Grey on the darkness broke the glimmering light;
Slowly assured he was not dead with fear
And pinches, cautious peer'd around the knight;
He found himself replaced beneath the oak,
And heard with rising wrath the chuckling croak.

CXXII.

"O bird of birds most monstrous and malific,
Were these the inns to which thou wert to lead!
Now gash'd with swords, now clawed by imps horrific;
Wives—wounds—cramps—pinches! Precious guide indeed!
Ossa on Pelion piling, crime on crime:
Wretch, save thy throttle, and repent in time!"

CXXIII.

Thus spoke the knight—the raven gave a grunt,
(That raven liked not threats to life or limb!)
Then with due sense of the unjust affront,
Hopp'd supercilious forth, and summoned him—
His mail once more the aching knight endued,
Limp'd to his steed, and ruefully pursued.

CXXIV.

The sun was high when all the glorious sea
Flash'd through the boughs that overhung the way,
And down a path, as rough as path could be,
The bird flew sullen, delving towards the bay;
The moody knight dismounts, and leads with pain
The stumbling steed, oft backing from the rein.

CXXV.

One ray of hope alone illumed his soul,
"The bird will lead thee to the ocean coast,"
The wizard's words had clearly mark'd the goal;
The goal once won—of course the guide was lost:
While thus consoled, its croak the raven gave,
Folded its wings and hopp'd into a cave.

CXXVI.

Sir Gawaine paused—Sir Gawaine drew his sword;
The bird unseen screamed loud for him to follow—
His soul the knight committed to our Lord,
Stepped on—and fell ten yards into a hollow;
No time had he the ground thus gained to note,
Ere six strong hands laid gripe upon his throat.

CXXVII.

It was a creek, three sides with rocks enclosed,
The fourth stretch'd, opening on the golden sand;
Dull on the wave an anchor'd ship reposed;
A boat with peaks of brass lay on the strand;
And in that creek caroused the grisliest crew
Thor ever nurst, or Rana*, ever knew.

CXXVIII.

But little cared the knight for mortal foes,
From those strong hands he wrench'd himself away,
Sprang to his feet and dealt so dour his blows,
Cleft to the chin a grim Berseker lay,
A Fin fell next, and next a giant Dane—
"Ten thousand pardons!" said the bland Gawaine.

CXXIX.

But ev'n in that not democratic age
Too large majorities were stubborn things,
Nor long could one man strive against the rage
Of half a hundred thick-skull'd ocean kings—
Four felons crept between him and the rocks,
Lifted four clubs and fell'd him like an ox.

CXXX.

When next the knight unclosed his dizzy eyes,
His feet were fettered and his arms were bound—
Below the ocean and above the skies;
Sails flapped—cords crackled; long he gazed around;
Still where he gazed, fierce eyes and naked swords
Peer'd through the flapping sails and crackling cords—

* Ran, or Rana, the malignant goddess of the sea, in Scandinavian mythology.

CXXXI.

A chief before him leant upon his club,
With hideous visage bush'd with tawny hair.
"Who plays at bowls must count upon a rub,"
Said the bruis'd Gawaine with a smiling air;
"Brave sir, permit me humbly to suggest
You make your gyves too tight across the breast."

CXXXII.

Grinn'd the grim chief, vouchsafing no reply;
The knight resumed—"Your pleasant looks bespeak
A mind as gracious;—may I ask you why
You fish for Christians in King Arthur's creek?"
"The kings of creeks," replied that hideous man,
"Are we, the Vikings and the sons of Ran!

CXXXIII.

"Your beacon fires allured us to your strands,
The dastard herdsmen fled before our feet,
Thee, Odin's raven guided to our hands;
Thrice happy man, Valhalla's boar to eat!
The raven's choice suggests it's God's idea,
And marks thee out—a sacrifice to Freya!"

CXXXIV.

As spoke the Viking, over Gawaine's head
Circled the raven with triumphal caw;
Then o'er the cliffs, still hoarse with glee, it fled.
Thrice a deep breath the knight relieved did draw,
Fair seem'd the voyage—pleasant seem'd the haven;
"Blest saints," he cried, "I have escaped the raven!"

KING ARTHUR.

BOOK VII.

ARGUMENT.

Arthur and the Lady of the Lake—They land on the Meteor Isle—which then sinks to the Halls below—Arthur beholds the Forest springing from a single stem—He tells his errand to the Phantom, and rejects the fruits that It proffers him in lieu of the Sword—He is conducted by the Phantom to the entrance of the caves, through which he must pass alone—He reaches the Coral Hall of the Three Kings—The Statue crowned with thorns—The Asps and the Vulture, and the Diamond Sword—The Choice of the Three Arches—He turns from the first and second arch, and beholds himself, in the third, a corpse—The sleeping King rises at Arthur's question—'if his death shall be in vain?'—The Vision of times to be—Cœur de Lion and the age of Chivalry—The Tudors—Henry VII.—the restorer of the line of Arthur and the founder of civil Freedom—Henry VIII. and the Revolution of Thought—Elizabeth and the Age of Poetry—The Union of Cymrian and Saxon, under the sway of 'Crowned Liberty'—Arthur makes his choice, and attempts, but in vain, to draw the Sword from the Rock—The Statue with the thorn-wreath addresses him—Arthur called upon to sacrifice the Dove—His reply—The glimpse of Heaven—The trance which succeeds, and in which the King is borne to the sea shores.

BOOK VII.

I.

As when, in Autumn nights and Arctic skies,
An angel makes the cloud his noiseless car,
And, thro' cerulean silence, silent flies
From antique Hesper to some dawning star,
So still, so swift, along the windless tides
Her vapour-sail the Phantom Lady guides.

II.

Along the sheen, along the glassy sheen,
Amid the lull of lucent night they go;
Till, in the haven of an islet green,
Murmuring thro' reeds, the gentle waters flow:
The shooting pinnace gains the gradual strand,
Hush'd as a shadow glides the Shape to land.

III.

The Cymrian, following, scarcely touch'd the shore
When slowly, slowly sunk the meteor-isle,
Fathom on fathom, to the sparry floor
Of alabaster shaft and porphyr-pile,
Built as by Nereus for his own retreat,
Or the Nymph-mother of the silver feet*.

* 'The silver-footed Thetis.'
HOMER.

IV.

Far, thro' the chrystal lymph, the pillar'd halls
Went lengthening on in vista'd majesty;
The waters sapp'd not the enchanted walls,
Nor shut their roofless silence from the sky;
But every beam that lights this world of ours
Broke sparkling downward into diamond showers.

V.

And the strange magic of the place bestow'd
Its own strange life upon the startled King,
Round him, like air, the subtle waters flow'd;
As round the Naiad flows her native spring;
Domelike collapsed the azure;—moonlight clear
Fill'd the melodious silvery atmosphere—

VI.

Melodious with the chaunt of distant falls
Of sportive waves, within the waves at play,
And infant springs that bubble up the halls
Thro' sparry founts, (on which the broken ray
Weaves its slight iris)—hymning while they rise
To that smooth calm their restless life supplies,

VII.

Like secret thoughts in some still poet's soul,
That swell the deep while yearning to the stars:—
But overhead a trembling shadow stole,
A gloom that leaf-like quiver'd on the spars,
And that quick shadow, ever moving, fell
From a vast Tree with root immoveable;

VIII.

In link'd arcades, and interwoven bowers
Swept the long forest from that single stem!
And, flashing through the foliage, fruits or flowers
In jewell'd clusters, glow'd with every gem
Golgonda hideth from the greed of kings;
Or Lybian gryphons guard with drowsy wings.

IX.

Here blushed the ruby, warm as Charity,
There the mild topaz, wrath-assuaging, shone
Radiant as Mercy;—like an angel's eye,
Or a stray splendour from the Father's throne,
The sapphire chaste a heavenlier lustre gave
To that blue heaven reflected on the wave.

X.

Never from India's cave, or Oman's sea
Swart Afrite stole for scornful Peri's brow,
Such gems as, wasted on that Wonder-tree,
Paled Sheban treasures in each careless bough;
And every bough the gliding wavelet heaves,
Quivers to music with the quivering leaves.

XI.

Then first the Sovereign Lady of the deep
Spoke;—and the waves and whispering leaves were still,
"Ever I rise before the eyes that weep
When, born from sorrow, Wisdom wakes the will;
But few behold the shadow thro' the dark,
And few will dare the venture of the bark.

XII.

"And now amid the Cuthites' temple halls
O'er which the waters undestroying flow,
Heark'ning the mysteries hymned from silver falls
Or from the springs that, gushing up below,
Gleam to the surface, whence to Heaven updrawn,
They form the clouds that harbinger the Dawn,—

XIII.

"Say what the treasures which my deeps enfold
That thou wouldst bear to the terrestrial day?"
Then Arthur answered—and his quest he told,
The prophet mission which his steps obey—
"Here springs the forest from the single stem:
I seek the falchion welded from the gem!"

XIV.

"Pause," said the Phantom, "and survey the tree!
More worth one fruit that weighs a branchlet down,
Than all which mortals in the sword can see.
Thou ask'st the falchion to defend a crown—
But seize the fruit, and to thy grasp decreed
More realms than Ormuzd lavish'd on the Mede;

XV.

"Than great Darius left his doomëd son,
From Scythian wastes to Abyssinian caves;
From Nimrod's tomb in silenc'd Babylon
To Argive islands fretting Asian waves;
Than chang'd to sceptres the rude Lictor-rods,
And plac'd the worm call'd Cæsar with the gods!

XVI.

"Pause—take thy choice—each gem a host can buy,
Seize—and yoke kings to War's triumphant car!
The Child of Earth, no Genii here defy,
The fruits unguarded, and the fiends afar—
But dark the perils that surround the Sword,
And slight its worth—ambitious if its Lord;

XVII.

"True to the warrior on his native soil,
Its blade would break in the Invader's clasp;
A weapon meeter for the sons of Toil,
When ploughshares turn to falchions in their grasp;—
Leave the rude boor to battle for his hearth—
Expand thy scope;—Ambition asks the Earth!"

XVIII.

"Spirit or Sorceress,"—said the frowning King,
"Fame like the Sun illumes an Universe;
But life and joy both Fame and Sun should bring;
And God ordains no glory for a curse.
The souls of kings should be the towers of law,
We right the balance, if the sword we draw!

XIX.

"Not mine the crowns the Persian lost or won,
Tiaras glittering over kneeling slaves;
Mine be the sword that freed at Marathon,
The unborn races by the Father-graves—
Or stay'd the Orient in the Spartan pass,
And carved on Time, thy name, Leonidas"

XX.

The Sibyl of the Sources of the Deep
Heard nor replied, but, indistinct and wan,
Went as a Dream that thro' the worlds of Sleep
Leads the charm'd soul of labour-wearied man;
And ev'n as man and dream, so, side by side,
Glideth the mortal with the gliding guide.

XXI.

Glade after glade, beneath that forest tree
They pass,—till sudden, looms amid the waves,
A dismal rock, hugely and heavily,
With crags distorted vaulting horrent caves;
A single moonbeam thro' the hollow creeps:
Glides with the beam the Lady of the deeps.

XXII.

Then Arthur felt the Dove that at his breast
Lay nestling warm—stir quick and quivering,
His soothing hand the crispëd plumes carest;—
Slow went they on, the Lady and the King:
And, ever as they went, before their way
O'er prison'd waters lengthening stretched the ray.

XXIII.

Now the black jaws as of a hell they gain;
The Lake's pale Hecate pauses. "Lo," she said,
"Within, the Genii thou invadest reign.
Alone thy feet the threshold floors must tread—
Lone is the path when glory is the goal;—
Pass to thy proof—O solitary soul!"

XXIV.

She spoke to vanish—but the single ray
Shot from the unseen moon, still palely breaketh
The awe that rests with midnight on the way;
Faithful as Hope when Wisdom's self forsaketh—
The buoyant beam the lonely man pursued—
And, feeling God, he felt not Solitude.

XXV.

No fiend obscene, no giant spectre grim,
(Born or of Runic or Arabian Song,)
Affronts the progress thro' the gallery dim,
Into the sudden light which flames along
The waves, and dyes the stillness of their flood
To one red horror like a lake of blood.

XXVI.

And now, he enters, with that lurid tide,
Where time-long corals shape a mighty hall;
Three curtain'd arches on the dexter side,
And on the floors a ruby pedestal,
On which, with marble lips, that life-like smil'd,
Stood the fair Statue of a crownëd Child:

XXVII.

It smil'd, and yet its crown was wreath'd of thorns,
And round its limbs coil'd foul the viper's brood;
Near to that Child a rough crag, deluge-torn,
Jagg'd, with sharp shadow abrupt, the luminous flood;
And a huge Vulture from the summit, there,
Watch'd, with dull hunger in its glassy stare.

XXVIII.

Below the Vulture, in the rock ensheathed,
Shone out the hilt-beam of the diamond glaive;
And all the hall one hue of crimson wreathed,
And all the galleries vista'd thro' the wave;
As flush'd the coral fathom-deep below,
Lit into glory from the ruby's glow.

XXIX.

And on three thrones there sate three giant forms,
Rigid the first, as Death;—with lightless eyes,
And brows as hush'd as deserts, when the storms
Lock the tornado in the Nubian skies;—
Dead on dead knees the large hands nerveless rest,
And dead the front droops heavy on the breast.

XXX.

The second shape, with bright and kindling eye
And aspect haughty with triumphant life,
Like a young Titan reared its crest on high,
Crown'd as for sway and harness'd as for strife;
But, o'er one half his image, there was cast
A shadow from the throne where sate the last.

XXXI.

And this, the third and last, seem'd in that sleep
Which neighbours waking in a summer's dawn,
When dreams, relaxing, scarce their captive keep:
Half o'er his face a veil transparent drawn,
Stirr'd with quick sighs unquiet and disturb'd,
Which told the impatient soul the slumber curb'd.

XXXII.

Thrill'd, but undaunted, on the Adventurer strode;
Then spoke the youthful Genius with the crown
And armour: "Hail to our august abode!
Guardless we greet the seeker of Renown.
In our least terror cravens Death behold,
But vainly frown our direst for the bold."

XXXIII.

"And who are ye?" the wondering King replied,
"On whose large aspects reigns the awe sublime
Of fabled judges, that o'er souls preside
In Rhadamanthian Halls?" The Lords of Time,
Answered the Giant, "And our realms are three,
The WHAT HAS BEEN, WHAT IS, and WHAT SHALL BE!

XXXIV.

"But while we speak my brother's shadow creeps
Over the life-blood that it freezes fast;
Haste, while the king that shall discrown me sleeps,
Nor lose the Present—lo, how dead the Past!
Accept the trials, Prince beloved by Heaven,
To the deep heart—(that nobler reason,) given.

XXXV.

"Thou hast rejected in the Cuthites' halls
The fruits that flush Ambition's dazzling tree,
The Conqueror's lust of blood-stained coronals;—
Again thine ordeal in thy judgment be!
Nor here shall empire need the arm of crime—
But Fate achieve the lot, thou ask'st from Time.

XXXVI.

"Behold the three-fold Future at thy choice,
Choose right, and win from Fame the master spell."
Then the concealing veils, as ceas'd the voice,
From the three arches with a clangor fell,
And clear as scenes with Thespian wonders rife
Gave to his view the Lemur-shapes of life.

XXXVII.

Lo the fair stream amidst that pleasant vale,
Wherein his youth held careless holiday;
The stream is blithe with many a silken sail,
The vale with many a proud pavilion gay,
And in the centre of the rosy ring,
Reclines the Phantom of himself—the King.

XXXVIII.

All, all the same as when his golden prime
Lay in the lap of Life's soft Arcady;
When the light love beheld no foe but Time,
When but from Pleasure heaved the prophet sigh,
And Luxury's prayer was as 'a Summer day,
Mid blooms and sweets to wear the hours away.'

XXXIX.

"Behold," the Genius said, "is that thy choice
As once it was?" "Nay, I have wept since then,"
Answered the mortal with a mournful voice,
"When the dews fall, the stars arise for men!"
So turn'd he to the second arch to see
The imperial peace of tranquil majesty;—

XL.

The kingly throne, himself the dazzling king;
Bright arms, and jewelled vests, and purple stoles;
While silver winds, from many a music-string,
Rippled the wave of glittering banderolls:
From mitred priests and ermined barons, clear
Came the loud praise which monarchs love to hear!

XLI.

"Doth this content thee?" "Ay," the Prince replied,
And towered erect, with empire on his brow;
"Ay, here at once a Monarch may decide,
Be but the substance worthy of the show!
Shew me the men whose toil the pomp creates,
Pomp is the robe,—Content the soul, of States!"

XLII.

Slow fades the pageant, and the Phantom stage
As slowly fill'd with squalid, ghastly forms;
Here, over fireless hearths cowered shivering Age
And blew with feeble breath dead embers;—storms
Hung in the icy welkin; and the bare
Earth lay forlorn in Winter's charnel air.

XLIII.

And Youth all labour-bow'd, with withered look,
Knelt by a rushing stream whose waves were gold,
And sought with lean strong hands to grasp the brook,
And clutch the glitter lapsing from the hold,
Till with mad laugh it ceas'd, and, tott'ring down,
Fell, and on frowning skies scowl'd back the frown.

XLIV.

No careless Childhood laughed disportingly,
But dwarf'd, pale mandrakes with a century's gloom
On infant brows, beneath a Poison-tree
With skeleton fingers plied a ghastly loom,
Mocking in cynic jests life's gravest things,
They wove gay King-robes, muttering "What are Kings?"

XLV.

And thro' that dreary Hades to and fro,
Stalk'd all unheeded the Tartarean Guests;
Grim Discontent that loathes the Gods, and Woe
Clasping dead infants to her milkless breasts;
And madding Hate, and Force with iron heel,
And voiceless Vengeance sharp'ning secret steel.

XLVI.

And, hand in hand, a Gorgon-visag'd Pair,
Envy and Famine, halt with livid smile,
Listening the demon-orator Despair,
That, with a glozing and malignant guile,
Seems sent the gates of Paradise to ope,
And lures to Hell by simulating Hope.

XLVII.

"Can such things be below and God above?"
Faltered the King;—Replied the Genius—"Nay,
This is the state that sages most approve;
This is Man civilized!—the perfect sway
Of Merçhant Kings;—the ripeness of the Art
Which cheapens men—the Elysium of the Mart.

XLVIII.

"Twixt want and wealth is placed the Reign of Gold;
The reign for which each race advancing sighs,
And none so clamour to be bought or sold
As those gaunt shadows—Trade's grim merchandize.
Dread not their curse—for their delirious sight
Hails in the yellow pest 'The march of Light.'"

XLIX.

"Better for nations," cried the wrathful King,
"The antique chief, whose palace was the glen,
Whose crown the plumage of the eagle's wing,
Whose throne the hill-top, and whose subjects—men,
Than that last thraldom which precedes decay,
For Avarice reigns not till the hairs are grey.

L.

"Is it in marts that manhood finds its worth?
When merchants reigned—what left they to admire?
Which hath bequeathed the nobler wealth to earth,
The steel of Sparta, or the gold of Tyre?
Beneath the night-shade let the mandrakes grow—
Hide from my sight that Lazar-house of woe!"

LI.

So, turn'd with generous tears in manly eyes
The hardy Lord of heaven-taught Chivalry;
Lo the third arch and last!—In moonlight, rise
The Cymrian rocks dark-shining from the sea,
And all those rocks, some patriot war, forgone,
Hallows with grassy mound and starlit stone.

LII.

And where the softest falls the loving light,
He sees himself, stretch'd lifeless on the sward,
And by the corpse, with sacred robes of white
Leans on his ivory harp a lonely Bard;
Yea, to the Dead the sole still watchers given
Are the Fame-Singer and the Hosts of Heaven.

LIII.

But on the kingly front the kingly crown
Rests;—the pale right hand grasps the diamond glaive;
The brow, on which ev'n strife hath left no frown,
Calm in the halo Glory gives the Brave.
"Mortal, is *this* thy choice?" the Genius cried.
"Here Death; there Pleasure; and there Pomp!—decide!"

LIV.

"Death," answer'd Arthur, "is nor good nor ill
Save in the ends for which men die—and Death
Can oft achieve what Life may not fulfil,
And kindle earth with Valour's dying breath;
But oh, one answer to one terror deign,
My land—my people!—is that death in vain?"

LV.

Mute droop'd the Genius, but the unquiet form
Dreaming beside its brother king, arose.
Tho' dreaming still: As leaps the sudden storm
On sands Arabian, as with spasms and throes
Bursts the Fire-mount by soft Parthenopé,
Rose the veil'd Genius of the Things to be!

LVI.

Shook all the hollow caves;—with tortur'd groan,
Shook to their roots in the far core of hell;
Deep howl'd to deep—the monumental throne
Of the dead giant rock'd;—each coral cell
Flash'd quivering billowlike. Unshaken smil'd,
From the calm ruby base the thorn-crown'd Child.

LVII.

The Genius rose; and thro' the phantom arch
Glided the Shadows of His own pale dreams;
The mortal saw the long procession march
Beside that image whichhis lemur seems:
An armed King—three lions on his shield*—
First by the Bard-watch'd Shadow paused and kneel'd.

LVIII.

Kneel'd, there, his train—upon each mailëd breast
A red cross stamp'd; and deep as from a sea
With all its waves—full voices murmur'd—"Rest
Ever unburied, Sire of Chivalry!
Ever by Minstrel watch'd, and Knight ador'd,
King of the halo-brow, and diamond sword!"

* Richard Cœur de Lion;—poetically speaking, the mythic Arthur was the Father of the age of adventure and knighthood—and the legends respecting him reigned with full influence, in the period which Richard Cœur de Lion, here (generally and without strict prosaic regard to chronology) represents; from the lay of the Troubadour and the song of the Saracen—to the final concentration of chivalric romance in the muse of Ariosto.

LIX

Then, as from all the courts of all the earth,
The reverent pilgrims, countless, clustering came;
They whom the seas of fabled Sirens girth,
Or Baltic freezing in the Boreal flame;
Or they, who watch the Star of Bethlem quiver
By Carmel's Olive mount, and Judah's river.

LX.

From violet Provence comes the Troubadour;
Ferrara sends her clarion-sounding son;
Comes from Iberian halls the turban'd Moor
With cymbals chiming to the clarion;
And, with large stride, amid the gaudier throng,
Stalks the vast Scald of Scandinavian song.

LXI.

Pass'd he who bore the lions and the cross,
And all that gorgeous pageant left the space
Void as a heart that mourns the golden loss
Of young illusions beautiful. A Race
Sedate, supplants upon the changeful stage,
Light's early sires,—the Song-World's hero-age.

LXII.

Slow come the Shapes from out the dim Obscure,
A noon-like quiet circles swarming bays,
Seas gleam with sails, and wall-less towns secure,
Rise from the donjon sites of antique days;
Lo, the calm sovereign of that sober reign!
Unarm'd,—with burghers in his pompless train.

LXIII.

And by the corpse of Arthur kneels that king,
And murmurs, "Father of the Tudor, hail!
To thee nor bays, nor myrtle wreath I bring;
But in thy Son, the Dragon-born prevail,
And in my rule Right first deposes Wrong;
And first the Weak undaunted face the Strong."

LXIV.

He pass'd—Another, with a Nero's frown
Shading the quick light of impatient eyes;
Strides on—and casts his sceptre, clattering, down,
And from the sceptre rushingly arise
Fierce sparks; along the heath they hissing run,
And the dull earth glows lurid as a sun.

LXV.

And there is heard afar the hollow crash
Of ruin;—wind-borne, on the flames are driven:
But where, round falling shrines, they coil and flash,
A seraph's hand extends a scroll from heaven,
And the rude shape cries loud, "Behold, ye blind,
I who have trampled Men, have freed the Mind!"

LXVI.

So laughing grim, pass'd the Destroyer on;
And, after two pale shadows, to the sound
Of lutes more musical than Helicon,
A manlike Woman march'd:—The graves around
Yawn'd, and the ghosts of Knighthood, more serene
In death,—arose, and smil'd upon the Queen.

LXVII.

With her, (at either hand) two starry forms
Glide—than herself more royal—and the glow
Of their own lustre, each pale phantom warms
Into the lovely life the angels know,
And as they pass, each Fairy leaves its cell,
And GLORIANA calls on ARIEL!

LXVIII.

Yet she, unconscious as the crescent queen
Of orbs whose brightness makes her image bright,
Haught and imperious, thro' the borrowed sheen,
Claims to herself the sovereignty of light;
And is herself so stately to survey,
That orbs which lend, but seem to steal, the ray.

LXIX.

Elf-land divine, and Chivalry sublime,
Seem there to hold their last high jubilee—
One glorious *Sabbat* of enchanted Time,
Ere the dull spell seals the sweet glamoury.
And all those wonder-shapes in subject ring
Kneel where the Bard still sits beside the King.

LXX.

Slow falls a mist, far booms a labouring wind,
As into night reluctant fades the Dream;
And lo, the smouldering embers left behind
From the old sceptre-flame, with blood-red beam,
Kindle afresh, and the thick smoke-reeks go
Heavily up from marching fires below.

LXXI.

Hark! thro' sulphureous cloud the jarring bray
Of trumpet-clangours—the strong shock of steel;
And fitful flashes light the fierce array
Of faces gloomy with the calm of zeal,
Or knightlier forms, on wheeling chargers borne;
Gay in despair, and meeting zeal with scorn.

LXXII.

Forth from the throng came a majestic Woe,
That wore the shape of man—"And I"—It said,
"I am thy Son; and if the Fates bestow
Blood on my soul and ashes on my head;
Time's is the guilt, tho' mine the misery—
This teach me, Father—to forgive and die!"

LXXIII.

But here stern voices drown'd the mournful word,
Crying—"Men's freedom is the heritage
Left by the Hero of the Diamond Sword,"
And others answered—"Nay, the knightly age
Leaves, as its heirloom, knighthood, and that high
Life in sublimer life call'd loyalty."

LXXIV.

Then, thro' the hurtling clamour came a fair
Shape like a sworded seraph—sweet and grave;
And when the war heaved distant down the air
And died, as dies a whirlwind on the wave,
By the two forms upon the starry hill,
Stood the Arch Beautiful, august and still.

LXXV.

And thus It spoke—"I too will hail thee, 'Sire,'
Type of the Hero-age!—thy sons are not
On the earth's thrones. They who, with stately lyre,
Make kingly thoughts immortal, and the lot
Of the hard life divine with visitings
Of the far angels—are thy race of Kings.

LXXVI.

"All that ennobles strife in either cause,
And, rendering service stately, freedom wise,
Knits to the throne of God our human laws—
Doth heir earth's humblest son with royalties
Born from the Hero of the diamond sword,
Watch'd by the Bard, and by the Brave ador'd."

LXXVII.

Then the Bard, seated by the halo'd dead,
Lifts his sad eyes—and murmurs, "Sing of Him!"
Doubtful the stranger bows his lofty head,
When down descend his kindred Seraphim;
Borne on their wings he soars from human sight,
And Heaven regains the Habitant of Light.

LXXVIII.

Again, and once again—from many a pale
And swift succeeding, dim-distinguished, crowd,
Swells slow the pausing pageant. Mount and vale
Mingle in gentle daylight, with one cloud
On the far welkin, which the iris hues
Steal from its gloom with rays that interfuse.

LXXIX.

Mild, like all strength, sits Crownëd Liberty,
Wearing the aspect of a youthful Queen:
And far outstretch'd along the unmeasured sea
Rests the vast shadow of her throne; serene
From the dumb icebergs to the fiery zone,
Rests the vast shadow of that guardian throne.

LXXX.

And round her group the Cymrian's changeless race
Blent with the Saxon, brother-like; and both
Saxon and Cymrian from that sovereign trace
Their hero line;—sweet flower of age-long growth;
The single blossom on the twofold stem;—
Arthur's white plume crests Cerdic's diadem.

LXXXI.

Yet the same harp that Taliessin strung
Delights the sons whose sires the chords delighted;
Still the old music of the mountain tongue
Tells of a race not conquered but united;
That, losing nought, wins all the Saxon won,
And shares the realm 'where never sets the sun.

LXXXII.

Afar is heard the fall of headlong thrones,
But from that throne as calm the shadow falls;
And where Oppression threats and Sorrow groans
Justice sits listening in her gateless halls,
And ev'n, if powerless, still intent, to cure,
Whispers to Truth, "Truths conquer that endure."

LXXXIII.

Yet still on that horizon hangs the cloud,
And on the cloud still rests the Cymrian's eye;
"Alas," he murmured, "that one mist should shroud,
Perchance from sorrow, that benignant sky!"
But while he sigh'd the Vision vanishëd,
And left once more the lone Bard by the dead.

LXXXIV.

"Behold the close of thirteen hundred years;
Lo! Cymri's Daughter on the Saxon's throne!
Free as their air thy Cymrian mountaineers,
And in the heavens one rainbow cloud alone,
Which shall not pass, until, the cycle o'er,
The soul of Arthur comes to earth once more.

LXXXV.

"Dost thou choose Death?" the giant Dreamer said.
"Ay, for in death I seize the life of fame,
And link the eternal millions with the dead,"
Replied the King—and to the sword he came
Large-striding;—grasp'd the hilt;—the charmëd brand
Clove to the rock, and stirr'd not to his hand.

LXXXVI.

The Dreaming Genius has his throne resum'd;
Sit the Great Three with Silence for their reign,
Awful as earliest Theban kings entomb'd,
Or idols granite-hewn in Indian fane;
When lo, the dove flew forth, and circling round,
Dropp'd on the thorn-wreath which the Statue crown'd

LXXXVII.

Rose then the Vulture with its carnage-shriek,
Up coil'd the darting Asps; the bird above;
Below the reptiles;—poison-fang and beak,
Nearer and nearer gathered round the dove;
When with strange life the marble Image stirr'd,
And sudden pause the Asps—and rests the Bird.

LXXXVIII.

"Mortal," the Image murmured, "I am He,
Whose voice alone the enchanted sword unsheathes,
Mightier than yonder Shapes—eternally
Throned upon light, tho' crown'd with thorny wreaths;
Changeless amid the Halls of Time;—my name
In heaven is YOUTH, and on the earth is FAME.

LXXXIX.

"All altars need their sacrifice; and mine
Asks every bloom in which thy heart delighted,
Thorns are my garlands—wouldst thou serve the shrine,
Drear is the faith to which thy vows are plighted.
The Asp shall twine,—the Vulture watch the prey,
And Horror rend thee, let but Hope give way.

XC.

"Wilt thou the falchion with the thorns it brings?"
"Yea—for the thorn-wreath hath not dimm'd thy smile."
"Lo, thy first offering to the Vulture's wings,
And the Asp's fangs!"—the cold lips answered, while
Nearer, and nearer the devourers came,
Where the Dove resting hid the thorns of Fame.

XCI.

And all the memories of that faithful guide,
The sweet companion of unfriended ways,
When danger threatened, ever at his side,
And ever, in the grief of later days,
Soothing his heart with its mysterious love,
Till Ægle's soul seem'd hovering in the Dove,—

XCII.

All cried aloud in Arthur, and he sprang
And sudden from the slaughter snatch'd the prey;
"What!" said the Image, "can a moment's pang
To the poor worthless favorite of a day
Appal the soul that yearns for ends sublime,
And sighs for empire o'er the worlds of Time?

XCIII.

"Wilt thou resign the guerdon of the Sword?
Wilt thou forego the freedom of thy land?
Not one slight offering will thy heart accord?
The hero's prize is for the martyr's hand."
Safe on his breast the King replaced the guide,
Raised his majestic front, and thus replied:

XCIV.

"For Fame and Cymri, what is mine I give,
Life;—and brave death prefer to ease and power;
But not for Fame or Cymri would I live
Soil'd by the stain of one dishonored hour;
And man's great cause was ne'er triumphant made,
By man's worst meanness—Trust for gain betray'd.

XCV.

"Let then the rock the Sword for ever sheathe,
All blades are charmëd in the Patriot's grasp!"
He spoke, and lo! the Statue's thorny wreath
Bloomed into roses—and each baffled asp
Fell down and died of its own poison sting,
Back to the crag dull-sail'd the death-bird's wing.

XCVI.

And from the Statue's smile, as when the morn
Unlocks the Eastern gates of Paradise,
Ineffable joy in light and beauty borne,
Flowed; and the azure of the distant skies
Stole thro' the crimson hues the ruby gave,
And slept, like Happiness, on Glory's wave.

XCVII.

"Go," said the Image, "thou hast won the Sword;
He who thus values Honour more than Fame
Makes Fame itself his servant, not his lord;
And the man's heart achieves the hero's claim.
But by Ambition is Ambition tried,
None gain the guerdon who betray the guide!"

XCVIII.

Wondering the Monarch heard, and hearing, laid
On the bright hilt-gem, the obedient hand;
Swift at the touch, leapt forth the diamond blade,
And each long vista lightened with the brand;
The speaking marble bowed its reverent head,
Rose the three Kings—the Dreamer and the Dead;

XCIX.

Voices far off, as in the heart of heaven,
Hymn'd "Hail, Fame-Conqueror in the Halls of Time;"
Deep as to hell the flaming vaults were riven;
High as to angels, space on space sublime
Opened, and flash'd upon the mortal's eye
The Morning Land of Immortality.

C.

Bow'd down before the intolerable light,
Sank on his knees the King; and humbly veil'd
The Home of Seraphs from the human sight;
Then the freed Soul forsook him, as it hail'd
Thro' Flesh, its prison-house,—the spirit-choir;
And fled as flies the music from the lyre.

CI.

And all was blank, and meaningless, and void;
For the dull form, abandoned thus below,
Scarcely it felt the closing waves that buoy'd
Its limbs, light-drifting down the gentle flow—
And when the conscious life returned again,
Lo, noon lay tranquil on the ocean main.

CII.

As from a dream he woke, and looked around,
For the lost Lake and Ægle's distant grave;
But dark, behind, the silent headlands frown'd;
And bright, before him, smil'd the murmuring wave;
His right hand rested on the falchion won;
And the Dove prun'd her pinions in the sun.

KING ARTHUR.

BOOK VIII.

ARGUMENT.

Lancelot continues to watch for Arthur till the eve of the following day, when a Damsel approaches the Lake—Lancelot's discreet behaviour thereon, and how the Knight and the Damsel converse—The Damsel tells her tale—Upon her leaving Lancelot, the fairy ring commands the Knight to desert his watch, and follow the Maiden—The story returns to Arthur, who, wandering by the sea-shore, perceives a Bark with the Raven flag of the sea kings—The Dove enjoins him to enter it—The Ship is deserted, and he waits the return of the Crew—Sleep falls upon him—The consoling Vision of Ægle—What befalls Arthur on waking—Meanwhile Sir Gawaine pursues his voyage to the Shrine of Freya, at which he is to be sacrificed—How the Hound came to bear him company—Sir Gawaine argues with the Viking on the inutility of roasting him—The Viking defends that measure upon philosophical and liberal principles, and silences Gawaine—The Ship arrives at its destination—Gawaine is conducted to the Shrine of Freya—The Statue of the Goddess described—Gawaine's remarks thereon, and how he is refuted and enlightened by the Chief Priest—Sir Gawaine is bound, and in reply to his natural curiosity, the Priest explains how he and the Dog are to be roasted and devoured—The sagacious proceedings of the Dog—Sir Gawaine fails in teaching the Dog the duty of Fraternization—The Priest re-enters, and Sir Gawaine, with much satisfaction, gets the best of the Argument—Concluding Stanzas to Nature.

BOOK VIII.

I.

LONE by the lake reclined young Lancelot—
Night passed, the noonday slept on wave and plain;
Lone by the lake watch'd patient Lancelot;
Like Faith assured that Love returns again.
Noon glided on to eve; when from the brake
Brush'd a light step, and paused beside the lake.

II.

How lovely to the margin of the wave
The shy-eyed Virgin came! and, all unwitting
The unseen Knight, to the frank sunbeam gave
Her sunny hair—its snooded braids unknitting;
And, fearless, as the Naiad by her well,
Sleek'd the loose tresses, glittering where they fell.

III.

And, playful now, the sandal silks unbound,
Oft from the cool fresh wave with coy retreat
Shrinking,—and glancing with arch looks around,
The chrystal gleameth with her ivory feet,
Like floating swan-plumes, or the leaves that quiver
From water-lilies, under Himera's river.

IV.

Ah happy Knight, unscathed, such charms espying,
As brought but death to the profane of yore,
When Dian's maids to angry quivers flying
Pierced the bold heart presuming to adore!
Alas! the careless archer they disdain,
Can slay as surely, though with longer pain.

V.

But worthy of his bliss, the loyal Knight
Pure from all felon thoughts as Knights should be,
Revering, angered at his own delight,
The lone, unconscious, guardless modesty,
Rose, yet unseen, and to the copse hard by
Stole with quick footstep, and averted eye.

VI.

But as one tremour of the summer boughs
Scares the shy fawn, so with that faintest sound
The Virgin starts, and back from rosy brows
Flings wide the showering gold; and all around
Casts the swift trouble of her looks, to see
The white plume glisten through the rustling tree.

VII.

As by some conscious instinct of the fear
He caused, the Knight turns back his reverent gaze;
And in soft accents, tuned to Lady's ear
In gentle courts, her purposed flight delays;
So nobly timid in his look and tone
As if the power to harm were all her own.

VIII.

"Lady, and liege, O fly not thus thy slave;
If he offend, unwilling the offence,
For safer not upon the unsullying wave
Doth thy pure image rest, than Innocence
On the clear thoughts of noble men!" He said;
And low with downcast lids, replied the maid.

IX.

[Oh from those lips how strangely musical
Sounds the loath'd language of the Saxon foe!]
"Tho' on mine ear the Cymrian accents fall,
And in my speech, O Cymrian, thou wilt know
The Daughter of the Saxon; marvel not,
That less I fear thee in this lonely spot,

X.

"Than hadst thou spoken in my mother-tongue,
Or worn the aspect of my father-race."
Here to her eyes some tearful memory sprung,
And youth's glad sunshine vanished from her face;
Like the changed sky the gleams of April leave,
Or the quick coming of an Indian eve.

XI.

Moved, yet emboldened by that mild distress,
Near the fair shape the gentle Cymrian drew,
Bent o'er the hand his pity dared to press,
And sooth'd the sorrow ere the cause he knew.
Frank were those times of trustful Chevisaunce*,
And Hearts when guileless open to a glance.

* Chevisaunce.—SPENSER.

XII.

So see them seated by the haunted lake,
She on the grassy bank, her sylvan throne,
He at her feet—and out from every brake
The Forest-Angels singing:—All alone
With Nature and the Beautiful—and Youth
Pure in each soul as, in her fountain, Truth!

XIII.

And thus her tale the Teuton maid begun:
"Daughter of Harold, Mercia's Earl, am I.
Small need to tell to Knighthood's Christian son
What creed of wrath the Saxons sanctify.
With songs first chaunted in some thunder-field,
Stern nurses rock'd me in my father's shield.

XIV.

"Motherless both,—my playmate, sole and sweet,
Years—sex, the same, was Crida's youngest child,
(Crida, the Mercian Ealder-King) our feet
Roved the same pastures when the Mead-month* smil'd;
By the same hearth we paled to Saga runes,
When wolves descending howl'd to icy moons.

XV.

"As side by side, two osiers o'er a stream,
When air is still, with separate foliage bend,
But let a breezelet blow, and straight they seem
With trembling branches into one to blend,
So grew our natures,—when in calm, apart,
But, in each care, commingling, heart to heart.

* The MEAD-MONTH, June.

XVI.

"Her soul was bright and tranquil as a bird
That hangs with silent wing in breathless heaven,
The plumes of mine the faintest zephyr stirr'd,
Light with each impulse by the moment given;
Blithe as the insect of the summer hours,
Child of the beam and playmate of the flowers.

XVII.

"Thus into youth we grew, when Crida bore
Home from fierce wars a British Woman-slave,
A lofty captive, who her sorrow wore
As Queens a mantle; yet not proud, tho' grave,
And grave as if with pity for the foe,
Too high for anger, too resigned for woe.

XVIII.

"Our hearts grew haunted by that patient face,
And much we schemed to soothe the sense of thrall.
She learned to love us,—let our love replace
That she had lost,—and thank'd her God for all,
Even for chains and bondage:—awed we heard,
And found the secret in the Gospel Word.

XIX.

"Thus, Cymrian, we were Christians. First, the slave
Taught that bright soul whose shadow fell on mine;
Thus we were Christians;—but, as thro' the cave
Flow hidden river-springs, the Faith Divine
We dared not give to day—in stealth we sung
Hymns to the Cymrian's God, in Cymri's tongue.

XX.

"And for our earlier names of heathen sound,
We did such names as saints have borne, receive;
One name in truth, tho' with a varying sound:
Genevra I--and she sweet Genevieve,—
Words that escaped from other ears, unknown,
But spoke as if from angels to our own.

XXI.

"Soon with thy creed we learned thy race to love,
Listening high tales of Arthur's peerless fame,
But most such themes did my sweet playmate move;
To her the creed endeared the champion's name,
With angel thoughts surrounded Christ's young chief,
And gave to Glory haloes from Belief.

XXII.

"Not long our teacher did survive, to guide
Our feet, delighted in the new-found ways;
Smiling on us—and on the cross—she died,
And vanish'd in her grave our infant days;
We grew to woman when we learned to grieve,
And Childhood left the eyes of Genevieve.

XXIII.

"Oft, ev'n from me, musing she stole away,
Where thick the woodland girt the ruin'd hall
Of Cymrian kings, forgotten;—thro' the day
Still as the lonely nightingale midst all
The joyous choir that drown her murmur:—So
Mused Crida's daughter on the Saxon's foe.

XXIV.

"Alas! alas! (sad moons have waned since then!)
One fatal morn her forest haunt she sought
Nor thence returned; whether by lawless men
Captured, or flying, of her own free thought,
From heathen shrines abhorr'd;—all search was vain,
Ne'er to our eyes that smile brought light again."

XXV.

Here paused the maid, and tears gush'd forth anew,
Ere faltering words rewove the tale once more;
"Rous'd from his woe, the wrathful Crida flew
To Thor's dark priests, and Odin's wizard lore.
Task'd was each rune that sways the demon hosts,
And the strong seid* compell'd revealing ghosts.

XXVI.

"And answered priest and rune, and the pale Dead,
'That in the fate of her, the Thor-descended,
The Gods of Cymri wove a mystic thread,
With Arthur's life and Cymri's glory blended,
And Dragon-Kings, ordained in clouded years,
To seize the birthright of the Saxon spears.

XXVII.

"'By Arthur's death, and Carduel's towers o'erthrown,
Could Thor and Crida yet the web unweave,
Protect the Saxon's threaten'd gods;—alone
Regain the lost one, and exulting leave
To Hengist's race the ocean-girt abodes,
Till the Last Twilight† darken round the Gods.'

* Magic.

† At Ragnarök, or the Twilight of the Gods, the Aser and the Giants are to destroy each other and the whole earth is to be consumed.

XXVIII.

"This heard and this believed, the direful King
Convenes his Eorl-born and prepares his powers,
Relates the omens, and the tasks they bring,
And points the Valkyrs to the Cymrian towers.
Dreadest in war—and wisest in the hall,
Stands my great Sire—the Saxon's Herman-Saul*.

XXIX.

"He to secure allies beyond the sea
Departs—but first, (for well he loved his child,)
He drew me to his breast, and tenderly
Chiding my tears, he spoke, and speaking smil'd,
'Whate'er betides thy father or thy land,
Far from our dangers Astrild† woos thy hand.

XXX.

"'Beorn, the bold son of Sweyn, the Göthland king,
Whose ocean war-steeds on the Baltic deeps
Range their blue pasture—for thy love shall bring
As nuptial-gifts, to Cymri's mountain keeps
Arm'd men and thunder. Happy is the maid,
Whose charms lure armies to her Country's aid.'

* HERMAN-SAUL (or Saule), often corruptly written Irminsula, Armensula, &c., the name of the celebrated Teuton Idol representing an armed warrior on a column, destroyed by Charlemagne A.D. 772.

† ASTRILD, the Cupid of the Northern Mythology.

XXXI.

"What, while I heard, the terror and the woe,
Of one who, vow'd to the meek Christian God,
Found the Earth's partner in the Heaven's worst foe!
For ne'er o'er blazing altars Slaughter trod,
Redder with blood of saints remorseless slain,
Than Beorn, the Incarnate Fenris* of the main.

XXXII.

"Yet than such nuptials more I feared the frown
Of my dread father;—motionless I stood,
Rigid in horror, mutely bending down
The eyes that dared not weep.—So Solitude
Found me, a thing made soulless by despair,
Till tears broke way, and with the tears flow'd prayer."

XXXIII.

Again Genevra paused: and beautiful,
As Art hath imaged Faith—look'd up to heaven,
With eyes that glistening smil'd. Along the lull
Of air, waves sigh'd—the winds of stealing Even
Murmured, birds sung, the leaflet rustling stirr'd;
His own loud heart was all the list'ner heard.

XXXIV.

"Scarce did my Sire return, (his mission done,)
To loose the Valkyrs on the Cymrian foe,
Than came the galley which the sea king's son
Sent for the partner of his realms of snow;
Shuddering, recoiling, forth I stole at night,
To the wide forest with wild thoughts of flight.

* FENRIS, the Demon Wolf, Son of Asa-Lok.

XXXV.

"I reached the ruined halls wherein so oft
Lost Genevieve had mused lone hours away,
When halting wistful there, a strange and soft
Slumber fell o'er me, or, more sooth to say,
A slumber not, but rather on my soul
A life-dream clear as hermit-visions stole.

XXXVI.

"I saw an aged and majestic form,
Robed in the spotless weeds thy Druids wear,
I heard a voice deep as when coming storm
Sends its first murmur through the heaving air;
'Return,'—it said—'return, and dare the sea,
The Eye that sleeps not looks from heaven on thee.'

XXXVII.

"The form was gone, the Voice was hush'd, and grief
Fled from my heart; I trusted, and obey'd:
Weak still, my weakness leant on my belief;
I saw the sails unfurl, the headlands fade;
I saw my father, last upon the strand,
Veiling proud sorrow with his iron hand.

XXXVIII.

"Swift through the ocean clove the flashing prows,
And half the dreaded course was glided o'er,
When, as the wolves, which night and winter rouse
In cavernous lairs, from seas without a shore
Clouds swept the skies; and the swift hurricane
Rush'd from the North along the maddening main.

XXXIX.

"Startled from sleep upon the verge of doom,
With wild cry, shrilling thro' the wilder blast,
Uprose the seamen, ghostlike thro' the gloom,
Hurrying and helpless; while the sail-less mast
Now lightning-wreath'd, now indistinct and pale,
Bow'd, or, rebounding, groaned against the gale,

XL.

"And crash'd at last;—its sullen thunder drown'd
In the great storm that snapp'd it. Over all
Swept the long surges, and a gurgling sound
Told where some wretch, that strove in vain to call
For aid, where all were aidless, thro' the spray
Emerging, gasp'd, and then was whirl'd away.

XLI.

"But I, who ever wore upon my heart
The symbol cross of Him who had walked the seas,
Bow'd o'er that sign my head; and pray'd apart:
When through the darkness, on his crawling knees,
Crept to my side the chief, and crouch'd him there,
Mild as an infant, listening to my prayer.

XLII.

"And, clinging to my robes, 'Thee have I seen,'
Faltering he said, 'when round thee coil'd the blue
Lightning, and rush'd the billow-swoop, serene
And scatheless smiling; surely then I knew
That, strong in charms or runes that guard and save,
Thou mock'st the whirlwind and the roaring grave!

XLIII.

"'Shield us, young Vala, from the wrath of Ran,
And calm the raging Helheim of the deep.'
As from a voice within, I answered, 'Man,
Nor rune nor charm locks into mortal sleep
The Present God; by Faith all ills are braved;
Trust in that God; adore Him, and be saved.'

XLIV.

"Then, pliant to my will, the ghastly crew
Crept round the cross, amid the howling dark—
Dark, save when swift and sharp, and griding* thro'
The cloud-mass, clove the lightning, and the bark
Flash'd like a floating hell; Low by that sign
All knelt, and voices hollow-chimed to mine.

XLV.

"Thus as we prayed, lo, opened all the Heaven,
With one long steadfast splendour—calmly o'er
The God-Cross resting: then the clouds were riven
And the rains fell; the whirlwind hush'd its roar,
And the smooth'd billows on the ocean's breast,
As on a mother's, sighing, sunk to rest.

XLVI.

"So came the dawn: o'er the new Christian fold,
Glad as the Heavenly Shepherd, smil'd the sun;
Then to those grateful hearts my tale I told,
The heathen bonds the Christian maid should shun,
And pray'd in turn their aid my soul to save
From doom more dismal than a sinless grave.

* Griding.—MILTON. "The *griding* sword with discontinuous wound, &c."

XLVII.

"They, with one shout, proclaim their law my will,
And veer the prow from northern snows afar,
Soon gentler winds the murmuring canvas fill,
Fair floats the bark where guides the western star,
From coast to coast we pass'd, and peaceful sail'd
Into lone creeks, by yon blue mountains veil'd.

XLVIII.

"Here all wide-scattered up the inward land
For stores and water, range the blithesome crew;
Lured by the smiling shores, one gentler band
I join'd awhile, then left them, to pursue
Mine own glad fancies, where the brooklet clear
Shot singing onwards to the sunlit mere.

XLIX.

"And so we chanced to meet!" She ceased, and bent
Down the fresh rose-hues of her eloquent cheek;
Ere Lancelot spoke, the startled echo sent
Loud shouts reverberate, lengthening, plain to peak;
The sounds proclaim the savage followers near,
And straight the rose-hues pale,—but not from fear.

L.

Slowly Genevra rose, and her sweet eyes
Raised to the Knight's, frankly and mournfully;
"Farewell," she said, "the wingëd moment flies
Who shall say whither?—if this meeting be
Our last as first, O Christian warrior, take
The Saxon's greeting for the Christian's sake.

LI.

"And if, returning to thy perill'd land,
In the hot fray thy sword confront my Sire,
Strike not—remember me!" On her fair hand
The Cymrian seals his lips; wild thoughts inspire
Words which the lips may speak not:— but what truth
Lies hid when youth reflects its soul in youth?

LII.

Reluctant turns Genevra, lingering turns,
And up the hill, oft pausing, languid wends.
As infant flame thro' humid fuel burns,
In Lancelot's heart with honour, love contends;
Longs to pursue, regain, and cry, "Where'er
Thou wanderest, lead me; Paradise is there!"

LIII.

But the lost Arthur!—at that thought, the strength
Of duty nerved the loyal sentinel:
So by the lake watch'd Lancelot;—at length
Upon the ring his looks, in drooping, fell,
And see, the hand, no more in dull repose,
Points to the path in which Genevra goes!

LIV.

Amazed, and wrathful at his own delight,
He doubts, he hopes, he moves, and still the ring
Repeats the sweet command, and bids the Knight
Pursue the Maid as if to find the King.
Yielding, at last, though half remorseful still,
The Cymrian follows up the twilight hill.

LV.

Meanwhile along the beach of the wide sea,
The dove-led pilgrim wandered,—needful food,
The Mænad's fruits from many a purple tree
Flush'd for the vintage, gave; with musing mood,
Lonely he strays till Æthra* sees again
Her starry children smiling on the main.

LVI.

Around him then, curved grey the hollow creek;
Before, a ship lay still with lagging sail;
A gilded serpent glittered from the beak,
Along the keel encoil'd with lengthening trail;
Black from a brazen staff, with outstretched wings
Soar'd the dread Raven of the Runic kings.

LVII.

Here paused the Wanderer, for here flew the Dove
To the tall mast, and, murmuring, hovered o'er;
But on the deck, no watch, no pilot move,
Life-void the vessel as the lonely shore.
Far on the sand-beach drawn, a boat he spied,
And with strong hand he launch'd it on the tide.

* Both the Pleiades and the Hyades are said to be the daughters of Æthra, one of the Oceanides, by Atlas.

LVIII.

Gaining the bark, still not a human eye
Peers through the noiseless solitary shrouds;
So, for the crew's return, all patiently
He sate him down, and watch'd the phantom clouds
Flit to and fro, where o'er the slopes afar
Reign storm-girt Arcas*, and the Mother Star.

LIX.

Thus sleep stole o'er him, mercy-hallow'd sleep;
His own lov'd Ægle, lovelier than of old,
Oh, lovelier far—shone from the azure deep—
And like the angel dying saints behold,
Bent o'er his brow, and with ambrosial kiss
Breath'd on his soul her own pure spirit-bliss.

LX.

"Never more grieve for me," the Vision said,
"Behold how beautiful thy bride is now!
Who to yon Heaven from heathen Hades led
Me, thine Immortal? Mourner, it was thou!
Why shouldst thou mourn? In the empyreal clime
We know no severance, for we own no time.

LXI.

"Both in the Past and Future circumfused,
We live in each;—all life's more happy hours
Bloom back for us;—all prophet Fancy mused
Fairest in days to come, alike are ours:
With me not yet—I ever am with thee,
Thy presence flows through my eternity.

* *Ursa Major* and *Ursa Minor*, near the North Pole, supposed by the Poets to be Arcas and his Mother.

LXII.

"Think thou hast bless'd the earth, and oped the heaven
To her baptized, reborn, through thy dear love,—
In the new buds that bloom for thee, be given
The fragrance of the primal flower above!
In Heaven we are not jealous!—But in aught
That heals remembrance and revives the thought,

LXIII.

"That makes the life more beautiful, we bind
Those who survive us in a closer chain;
In all that glads we feel ourselves enshrined;
In all that loves, our love but lives again."
Anew she kiss'd his brow, and at her smile
Night and Creation brighten'd! He, the while,

LXIV.

Stretch'd his vain arms, and clasp'd the mocking air,
And from the rapture woke*!—All fiercely round
Group savage forms, amidst the lurid glare
Of lifted torches, red; fierce tongues resound,
Discordant clamouring hoarse—as birds of prey
Scared by man's footstep in some desolate bay.

* The reader will perhaps perceive, that the above passage, containing the Vision of Ægle, is partially borrowed from the apparition of Clorinda, in TASSO.—*Cant.* xii.

LXV.

Mild thro' the throng a bright-hair'd Virgin came,
And the roar hush'd;—while to the Virgin's breast
Soft-cooing fled the Dove. His own great name
Rang thro' the ranks behind; quick footsteps prest
(As thro' arm'd lines a warrior) to the spot,
And to the King knelt radiant Lancelot.

LXVI.

Here for a while the wild and fickle song
Leaves the crown'd Seeker of the Silver Shield;
Thy fates, O Gawaine, done to grievous wrong
By the black guide perfidious, be reveal'd,
Nearing, poor Knight, the Cannibalian shrine,
Where Freya scents thee, and prepares to dine.

LXVII.

Left by a bride, and outraged by a raven,
One friend still shared the injured captive's lot;
For, as the vessel left the Cymrian haven,
The faithful hound, whom he had half forgot,
Swam to the ship, clombe, up the sides, on board,
Snarl'd at the Danes, and nestled by his lord.

LXVIII.

The hirsute Captain, not displeased to see a
New *bonne bouche* added to the destined roast
His floating larder had prepared for Freya,
Welcomed the dog, as Charon might a ghost;
Allowed the beast to share his master's platter,
And daily eyed them both,—and thought them fatter!

LXIX.

Ev'n in such straights, the Knight of golden tongue
Confronts his foe with arguings just and sage,
Whether in pearls from deeps Druidic strung,
Or link'd synthetic from the Stagirite's page,
Labouring to show him how absurd the notion,
That roasting Gawaine would affect the Ocean.

LXX.

But that enlightened tho' unlearned man,
Posed all the lore Druidical or Attic;
"One truth," quoth he, "instructs the Sons of Ran,
(A seaman race are always democratic)
That truth once known, all else is worthless lumber:
'THE GREATEST PLEASURE OF THE GREATEST NUMBER.'

LXXI.

"No pleasure like a Christian roasted slowly,
To Odin's greatest number can be given;
The will of freemen to the gods is holy;
The People's voice must be the voice of Heaven.
On selfish principles you chafe at capture,
But what are private pangs to public rapture?

LXXII.

"You doubt that giving you as food for Freya
Will have much marked effect upon the seas;
Let's grant you right:—all pleasure's in idea;
If thousands think it, you the thousands please.
Your private interest must not be the guide,
When interests clash majorities decide."

LXXIII.

These doctrines, wise, and worthy of the race
From whose free notions modern freedom flows,
Bore with such force of reasoning on the case,
They left the Knight dumbfounded at the close;
Foiled in the weapons which he most had boasted,
He felt sound logic proved he should be roasted.

LXXIV.

Discreetly waiving farther conversations,
He, henceforth, silent lived his little hour;
Indulged at times such soothing meditations,
As, "Flesh is grass,"—and "Life is but a flower."
For men, like swans, have strains most edifying,
They never think of till the time for dying.

LXXV.

And now at last, the fatal voyage o'er,
Sir Gawaine hears the joyous shout of "Land!"
Two Vikings lead him courteously on shore:
A crowd as courteous wait him on the strand.
Fifes, viols, trumpets braying, screaming, strumming,
Flatter his ears, and compliment his coming.

LXXVI.

Right on the shore the gracious temple stands,
Form'd like a ship, and builded but of log;
Thither at once the hospitable bands
Lead the grave Knight and unsuspicious dog,
Which, greatly pleased to walk on land once more,
Swells with unprescient bark the tuneful roar.

LXXVII.

Six Priests and one tall Priestess clothed in white,
Advance—and meet them at the porch divine;
With seven loud shrieks, they pounce upon the Knight,—
Whisked by the Priests behind the inmost shrine,
While the tall Priestess asks the congregation
To come at dawn to witness the oblation.

LXXVIII.

Tho' somewhat vex'd at this so brief delay—
Yet as the rites, in truth, required preparing,
The flock obedient took themselves away;—
Meanwhile the Knight was on the Idol staring,
Not without wonder at the tastes terrestrial
Which in that image, hail'd a shape celestial.

LXXIX.

Full thirty ells in height—the goddess stood
Bas'd on a column of the bones of men,
Daub'd was her face with clots of human blood,
Her jaws as wide, as is a tiger's den;
With giant fangs as strong and huge as those
That cranch the reeds, thro' which the sea-horse goes.

LXXX.

"Right reverend Sir," quoth he of golden tongue,
"A most majestic gentlewoman this!
Is it the Freya*, whom your scalds have sung,
Goddess of love and sweet connubial bliss?—
If so—despite her very noble carriage,
Her charms are scarce what youth desires in marriage."

* Freya is the Goddess of love, beauty, and Hymen; the Scandinavian Venus.

LXXXI.

"Stranger," said one who seemed the hierarch-priest—
"In that sublime, symbolical creation,
The outward image but conveys the least
Of Freya's claims on human veneration—
But, (thine own heart if Love hath ever glowed in,)
Thou'lt own that Love is quite as fierce as Odin!

LXXXII.

"Hence, as the cause of full one half our quarrels,
Freya with Odin shares the rites of blood;—
In this—thou see'st a hidden depth of morals,
But by the vulgar little understood;—
We do not roast thee in an idle frolic;
But as a type mysterious and symbolic."

LXXXIII.

The Hierarch motions to the priests around,
They bind the victim to the Statue's base,
Then, to the Knight they link the wondering hound,
Some three yards distant—looking face to face.
"One word," said Gawaine—"ere your worships quit us,
"How is it meant that Freya is to eat us?"

LXXXIV.

"Stranger," replied the Priest—"albeit we hold
Such questions idle, and perhaps profane;
Yet much the wise will pardon to the bold—
When what they ask 'tis easy to explain—
Still typing Truth, and shaped with sacred art,
We place a furnace in the statue's heart.

LXXXV.

"That furnace heated by mechanic laws
Which gods to priests for godlike ends permit,
We lay the victim bound across the jaws,
And let him slowly turn upon a spit;
The jaws—(when done to what we think their liking)
Close;—all is over:—The effect is striking!"

LXXXVI.

At that recital made in tone complacent,
The frozen Knight stared speechless and aghast,
Stared on those jaws to which he was subjacent,
And felt the grinders cranch on their repast.
Meanwhile the Priest said—"Keep your spirits up,
And ere I go, say when you'd like to sup?"

LXXXVII.

"Sup!" faltered out the melancholy Knight,
"Sup! pious Sir—no trouble there, I pray!
Good tho' I grant my natural appetite,
The thought of Freya's takes it all away:
As for the dog—poor, unenlightened glutton,
Blind to the future,—let him have his mutton."

LXXXVIII.

'Tis night: behold the dog and man alone!
The man hath said his thirtieth *noster pater*,
The dog has supped, and having picked his bone,
(The meat was salted) feels a wish for water;
Puts out in vain a reconnoitring paw,
Feels the cord, smells it, and begins to gnaw.

LXXXIX.

Abash'd Philosophy, that dog survey!
Thou call'st on freemen—bah! expand thy scope!
'*Aide-toi toi-même, et Dieu t'aidera!*'
Doth thraldom bind thee?—gnaw thyself the rope.—
Whatever Laws, and Kings, and States may be;
Wise men in earnest, can be always free.

XC.

By a dim lamp upon the altar stone
Sir Gawaine marked the inventive work canine;
"Cords bind us both—the dog has gnawed his own;
O Dog skoinophagous*—a tooth for mine!—
And both may scape that too-refining Goddess
Who roasts to types what Nature meant for bodies."

XCI.

Sir Gawaine calls the emancipated hound,
And strives to shew his own illegal ties;
Explaining how free dogs, themselves unbound,
With all who would be free should fraternise—
The dog looked puzzled, licked the fettered hand,
Pricked up his ears—but would not understand.

XCII.

The unhappy Knight perceived the hope was o'er,
And did again to fate his soul resign;
When hark! a footstep, and an opening door,
And lo, once more, the Hierarch of the shrine,
The dog his growl at Gawaine's whisper ceast,
And dog and Knight, both silent, watched the priest.

* Id est, "rope-eating"—a compound adjective borrowed from such Greek as Sir Gawaine might have learned at the then flourishing college of Caerleon. The lessons of education naturally recur to us in our troubles.

XCIII.

The subtle captive, saw with much content
No sacred comrades had that reverend man;
Beneath a load of sacred charcoal bent,
The Priest approach'd; when Gawaine thus began:
"It shames me much to see you thus bent double,
And feel myself the cause of so much trouble.

XCIV.

"Doth Freya's kitchen, ventrical and holy,
Afford no meaner scullion to prepare
The festive rites?—on you depends it wholly
To heat the oven and to dress the fare?"
"To hands less pure are given the outward things,
To Hierarchs only, the interior springs,"

XCV.

Replied the Priest—"and till my task is o'er
All else intruding, wrath divine incur."
Sir Gawaine heard and not a sentence more
Sir Gawaine said, than—"Up and seize him, Sir,"
Sprung at the word, the dog; and in a trice
Grip'd the Priest's throat and lock'd it like a vice.

XCVI.

"Pardon, my sacred friend," then quoth the Knight,
"You are not strangled from an idle frolic,
When bit the biter, you'll confess the bite
Is full of sense, mordacious but symbolic;
In roasting men, O culinary brother,
Learn this grand truth—'one turn deserves another!'"

XCVII.

Extremely pleased, the oratoric Knight
Regained the vantage he had lost so long,
For sore, till then, had been his just despite
That Northern wit should foil his golden tongue.
Now, in debate how proud was his condition,
The opponent posed and by his own position!

XCVIII.

Therefore, with more than his habitual breeding,
Resumed benignantly the bland Gawaine,
While much the Priest, against the dog's proceeding
With stifling gasps protested, but in vain—
"Friend—(softly, dog; so—ho!) Thou must confess
Our selfish interests bid us coalesce.—

XCIX.

"Unknit these cords; and, once unloosed the knot,
I pledge my troth to call the hound away,
If thou accede—a show of hands! if not
That dog at least I fear must have his day."
High in the air, both hands at once appear!
"Carried, *nem. con.*,—Dog, fetch him,—gently, here!"

C.

Not without much persuasion yields the hound!
Loosens the throat, to gripe the sacred vest.
"Priest," quoth Gawaine, "remember, but a sound,
And straight the dog—let fancy sketch the rest!"
The Priest, by fancy too dismay'd already,
Fumbles the knot with fingers far from steady.

CI.

Hoarse, while he fumbles, growls the dog suspicious,
Not liking such close contact to his Lord;
(The best of friends are sometimes too officious,
And grudge all help save that themselves afford.)
His hands set free, the Knight assists the Priest,
And, *finis, funis,* stands at last releast.

CII.

True to his word—and party coalitions,
The Knight then kicks aside the dog, of course;
Salutes the foe, and states the new conditions
The facts connected with the times enforce;
All coalitions nat'rally denote,
That State-Metempsychosis—change of coat!

CIII.

"Ergo," quoth Gawaine,—"first, the sacred cloak;
Next, when two parties, but concur *pro temp.*
Their joint opinions only should be spoke
By that which has most cause to fear the hemp.
Wherefore, my friend, this scarf supplies the gag
To keep the cat symbolic—in the bag!—"

CIV.

So said, so done, before the Priest was able
To prove his counter interest in the case,
The Knight had bound him with the victim's cable,
Closed up his mouth and covered up his face,
His sacred robe with hands profane had taken,
And left him that which Gawaine had forsaken.

CV.

Then Gawaine stept into the blissful air,
Oh, the bright wonder of the Northern Night!
With Ocean's heart of music heaving there,
Under its starry robe!—and all the might
Of rock and shore, and islet deluge-riven,
Distinctly dark against the lustrous heaven!

CVI.

Calm lay the large rude Nature of the North,
Glad as when first the stars rejoicing sang,
And fresh as when from kindling Chaos forth
(A thought of God) the young Creation sprang;
When man in all the present Father found,
And for the Temple, paused and looked around!

CVII.

Nature, thou earliest Gospel of the Wise,
Thou never-silent Hymner unto God!
Thou Angel-Ladder lost amid the skies,
Tho' at the foot we dream upon the sod!
To thee the Priesthood of the Lyre belong—
They hear Religion and reply in Song!

CVIII.

If he hath held thy worship undefil'd
Through all the sins and sorrows of his youth,
Let the Man echo what he heard as Child
From the far hill-tops of melodious Truth,
Leaving on troubled hearts some lingering tone
Sweet with the solace thou hast given his own!

KING ARTHUR.

BOOK IX.

ARGUMENT.

Invocation to the North—Winter, Labour, and Necessity, as Agents of Civilization—The Polar Seas described—The lonely Ship; its Leader and Crew—Honour due from Song to the Discoverer!—The battle with the Walruses—The crash of the floating Icebergs—The ship ice-locked—Arthur's address to the Norwegian Crew—They abandon the vessel and reach land—The Dove finds the healing herb—Returns to the ship, which is broken up for log-huts—The winter deepens—The sufferings and torpor of the crew—The effect of Will upon life—Will preserves us from ills our own, not from sympathy with the ills of others—Man in his higher development has a two-fold nature—in his imagination and his feelings—Imagination is lonely, Feeling social—The strange affection between the King and the Dove—The King sets forth to explore the desert; his joy at recognizing the print of human feet—The attack of the Esquimaux—The meeting between Arthur and his friend—The crew are removed to the ice-huts of the Esquimaux—The adventures of Sir Gawaine continued—His imposture in passing himself off as a priest of Freya—He exorcises the winds which the Norwegian hags had tied up in bags—And accompanies the Whalers to the North Seas—The storm—How Gawaine and his hound are saved—He delivers the Pigmies from the Bears, and finally establishes himself in the Settlement of the Esquimaux—Philosophical controversy between Arthur and Gawaine, relative to the Raven—Arthur briefly explains how he came into the Polar Seas in search of the Shield of Thor—Lancelot and Genevra having sailed for Carduel—Gawaine informs Arthur that the Esquimaux have a legend of a Shield guarded by a Dwarf—The first appearance of the Polar Sun above the horizon.

BOOK IX.

I.

THRONED on the dazzling and untroddèn height,
Formed of the frost-gems ages* labour forth
From the blanch'd air,—crown'd with the pomp of light
I' the midst of dark,—stern Father of the North,
Thee I invoke, as, awed, my steps profane
The dumb gates opening on thy deathlike reign!

II.

Thee, sure the Ithacan†—thee, sure, dread lord,
(When in the dusky, wan, Cimmerian waste
By the last bounds of Ocean, he explored
Ghast Erebus,) beheld;—and here embraced
In vain the Phantom Mother! lo, the gloom
Pierced by no sun,—the Hades of the tomb!—

III.

Magnificent Horror!—How like royal Death
Broods thy great hush above the seeds of Life!
Under the snow-mass cleaves thine icy breath,
And, with the birth of fairy forests rife,
Blushes the world of white‡;—the green that glads
The wave, is but the march of myriads;

* The mountains of hard and perfect ice are the gradual production perhaps of many centuries.—LESLIE'S *Polar Seas and Regions.*

† Ulysses. *Odys.* l. xi.

‡ The phenomenon of the red snow on the Arctic mountains is formed by innumerable vegetable bodies; and the olive green of the Greenland Sea by Medusan animalcules, the number of which Mr. Scoresby illustrates by supposing that 80,000 persons would have been employed since the creation in counting it.—See LESLIE.

IV.

There, immense, moves uncouth leviathan;
  There, from the hollows of phantasmal isles,
The morse* emerging rears the face of man,
  There, the huge bear scents, miles on desolate miles,
The basking seal;—and ocean shallower grows,
Where, thro' its world a world, the kraken goes.

V.

Father of races, marching at the van
  Of the great league and armament of Thought;—
When Eastern stars grew dim to drooping man,
  And waned the antique light Prometheus brought,
The North beheld the new Alcides rise,
Unbind the Titan and relight the skies.

VI.

Imperial WINTER, hail!—All hail with thee
  Labour, the stern Perfecter of Mankind,
Shaping the ends of human destiny
  Out of the iron of the human mind:
For in our toils our fates we may survey;
And where rests Labour there begins decay.

VII.

Winter, and Labour, and Necessity,
  Behold the Three that make us what we are!
Forc'd to invent—aspirers to the High,
  Nerv'd to endure—the conquerors of the Far—
So the crude nebula in movement hurl'd,
Takes form in moving, and becomes a world.

* The Morse, or Walrus, supposed to be the original of the Merman; from the likeness its face presents at a little distance to that of a human being.

VIII.

Dumb Universe of Winter—there it lies
Dim thro' the mist, a spectral skeleton!
Far in the wan verge of the solid skies
Hangs day and night the phantom of a moon;
And slowly moving on the horizon's brink
Floats the vast ice-field with its glassy blink*.

IX.

But huge adown the liquid Infinite
Drift the sea Andes—by the patient wrath
Of the strong waves uprooted from their site
In bays forlorn—and on their winter path,
(Themselves a winter,) glide, or heavily, where
They freeze the wind, halt in the inert air.

X.

Nor bird nor beast lessens with visible
Life, the large awe of space without a sun;
Tho' in each atom life unseen doth dwell
And glad with gladness God the Living One.
He breathes—but breathless hang the airs that freeze!
He speaks—but noiseless list the silences!

XI.

A lonely ship—lone in the measureless sea,
Lone in the channel thro' the frozen steeps,
Like some bold thought launched on infinity
By early sage—comes glimmering up the deeps!
The dull wave, dirge-like, moans beneath the oar;
The dull air heaves with wings that glide before.

* The ice-blink seen on the horizon.

XII.

From earth's warm precincts, thro' the sunless gate
That guards the central vapour-home of Dark,
Into the heart of the vast Desolate,
Lone flies the Dove before the lonely bark.
While the crown'd seeker of the glory-spell
Looks to the angel and disdains the hell.

XIII.

Huddled on deck, one-half that hardy crew
Lie shrunk and withered in the biting sky,
With filmy stare and lips of livid hue,
And sapless limbs that stiffen as they lie;
While the dire pest-scourge of the frozen zone*
Rots thro' the vein, and gnaws the knotted bone.

XIV.

Yet still the hero-remnant, sires perchance
Of Rollo's Norman knighthood, dauntless steer
Along the deepening horror, and advance
Upon the invisible foe, loud chaunting clear
Some lusty song of Thor, the Hammer-God,
When o'er those iron seas the Thunderer trod,

* Though the fearful disease known by the name of the scurvy is not peculiar to the northern latitudes; and Dr. Budd has ably disproved (in the Library of Practical Medicine) the old theory that it originated in cold and moisture: yet the disease was known in the north of Europe from the remotest ages, while no mention is made of its appearance in more genial climates before the year 1260.

XV.

And pierced the halls of Lok! Still while they sung,
The sick men lifted dim their languid eyes,
And palely smiled, and with convulsive tongue
Chimed to the choral chaunt in hollow sighs;
Living or dying, those proud hearts the same
Swell to the danger and foretaste the fame.

XVI.

On, ever on, labours the lonely bark.
Time in that world seems dead. Nor jocund sun
Nor rosy Hesperus dawns; but visible Dark
Stands round the ghastly moon. For ever on
Labours the lonely bark, thro' lock'd defiles
That crisping coil around the drifting isles.

XVII.

Honour, thrice honour unto ye, O Brave!
And ye, our England's sons, in the later day,
Whose valour to the shores of Hela gave
Names,—as the guides where suns deny the ray!
And, borne by hope and vivid strength of soul,
Left Man's last landmark—Nature's farthest goal!

XVIII.

Whom, nor the unmoulded chaos, with its birth
Of uncouth monsters, nor the fierce disease,
Nor horrible famine, nor the Stygian dearth
Of Orcus, dead'ning adamantine seas,
Scared from the Spirit's grand desire,—TO KNOW!
The Galileos of new worlds below!

XIX.

Man the Discoverer—whosoe'er thou art,
Honour to thee from all the lyres of song!
Honour to him who leads to Nature's heart
One footstep nearer! To the Muse belong
All who enact what in the song we read;
Man's noblest poem is Man's bravest deed.

XX.

On, ever on,—when veering to the West
Into a broader desert leads the Dove;
A larger ripple stirs the ocean's breast,
A hazier vapour undulates above;
Along the ice-fields move the things that live,
Large in the life the misty glamours give.

XXI.

In flocks the lazy walrus lay around
Gazing and stolid; while the dismal crane
Stalk'd curious near;—and on the hinder ground
Paused indistinct the Fenris of the main,
The insatiate bear,—to sniff the stranger blood,—
For Man till then had vanished since the flood,

XXII.

And all of Man were fearless!—On the sea
The vast leviathans came up to breathe,
With their young giants leaping forth in glee,
Or leaving whirlpools where they sank beneath.
And round and round the bark the narwal* sweeps,
With white horn glistening thro' the sluggish deeps.

* The Sea Unicorn.

XXIII.

Uprose a bold Norwegian, hunger-stung,
As near the icy marge a walrus lay,
Hurl'd his strong spear, and smote the beast, and sprung
Upon the frost-field on the wounded prey;—
Sprung and recoiled—as, writhing with the pangs,
The bulk crawled towards him with its flashing fangs.

XXIV.

Roused to fell life—around their comrade throng,
Snorting wild wrath, the shapeless, grisly swarms—
Like moving mounts slow masses trail along;
Aghast the man beholds the larva-forms—
Flies—climbs the bark—the deck is scaled—is won;
And all the monstrous march heaves lengthening on.

XXV.

"Quick to your spears!" the kingly leader cries.
Spears flash on flashing tusks; groan the strong planks
With the assault: front after front they rise
With their bright* stare; steel thins in vain their ranks,
And dyes with blood their birth-place and their grave;
Mass rolls on mass, as rolls on wave a wave.

XXVI.

These strike and rend the reeling sides below;
Those grappling clamber up and load the decks,
With looks of wrath so human on the foe,
They seem to horror like the mangled wrecks
Of what were men in worlds before the Ark!
Thus rag'd the immane and monster war—when, hark,

* The eye of the Walrus is singularly bright.

XXVII.

Crash'd thro' the dreary air a thunder peal!
In their slow courses meet two ice-rock isles
Clanging; the wide seas far-resounding reel;
The toppling ruin rolls in the defiles;
The pent tides quicken with the headlong shock;
Broad-billowing heave the long waves from the rock;

XXVIII.

Far down the booming vales precipitous
Plunges the stricken galley,—as a steed
Smit by the shaft runs reinless,—o'er the prows
Howl the lash'd surges; Man and monster freed
By power more awful from the savage fray,
Here roaring sink—there dumbly whirl away.

XXIX.

The water runs in mäelstroms;—as a reed
Spins in an eddy and then skirs along,—
Dragg'd round and round, emerg'd and vanishëd
The mighty ship amidst the mightier throng
Of the revolving hell. With abrupt spring
Bounding at last—on it shot maddening.

XXX.

Behind it, thunderous swept the glacier masses,
Shivering and splintering, hurtling each on each:
Narrower and narrower press the frowning passes:—
Jamm'd in the farthest gorge the bark may reach,
Where the grim Scylla locks the direful way,
The fierce Charybdis flings her mangled prey.

XXXI.

As if a living thing, in every part
The vessel groans—and with a dismal chime
Cracks to the cracking ice; asunder start
The brazen ribs:—and, clogg'd and freezing, climb
Thro' cleft and chink, as thro' their native caves,
The gelid armies of the hardening waves.

XXXII.

One sigh whose lofty pity did embrace
The vanish'd many, the surviving few,
The Cymrian gave—then with a cheering face
He spoke, and breath'd his soul into the crew,
"Ye whom the haught desire of Fame, whose air
Is storm,—and tales of what your fathers were,

XXXIII.

"What time their valour wrought such deeds below
As made the valiant lift them to the gods,
Impell'd with me to spare all meaner foe,
And vanquish Nature in the fiend's abodes;—
Droop not nor faint!—Reserved perchance, to give
Themes to such song as bids your Odin live:—

XXXIV.

"A voice from those now gone in darkness down,
Bids us endure!—Of all they ask'd in life
Our death would rob their lofty shades—RENOWN!
The wave hath pluck'd us from the monster strife,
Lo where the icebay frees us from the wave,
And yields a port in what we deemed a grave!

XXXV.

"Up and at work all hands to lash the bark
With grappling hook, and cord, and iron band
To yon firm peak, the Ararat of our ark,
Then with good heart pierce to the vapour-land;
For the crane's scream, and the bear's welcome roar
Tell where the wave joins solid to the shore."

XXXVI.

Swift as he spoke, the gallant Northmen sprang
On the sharp ice,—drew from the frozen blocks
The mangled wreck;—with many a barbëd fang
And twisted cable to the horrent rocks
Moor'd: and then, shouting up the solitude,
Their guiding star, the Dove's pale wing, pursued.

XXXVII.

Round the dim bases of the glacier peaks,
They see the silvery Arctic fox at play,
Sure sign of land,—aloft with ghastly shrieks,
Wheel the wan sea gulls, luring to his prey
The ravening glaucus* sudden shooting o'er
The din of wings from the grey gleaming shore.

XXXVIII.

At length they reach the land,—if land that be
Which seems so like the frost piles of the deep,
That where commenced the soil and ceased the sea
Shows dim, as is the bound between the sleep
And waking of some wretch whose palsied brain
Dulls him to ev'n the slow return of pain.

* The Larus Glaucus, the great bird of prey in the Polar regions.

XXXIX.

Advancing farther, burst upon the eye
Patches of green miraculously isled
In the white desert. Oh! the rapture cry
That greeted God and gladdened thro' the wild!
The very sight suffices to restore,
Green Earth—green Earth—the Mother, smiles once more!

XL.

Blithe from the turf the Dove the blessed leaves*
That heal the slow plague of the sunless dearth
Bears to each sufferer whom the curse bereaves
Ev'n of all hope, save graves in that dear earth.
Woo'd by the kindly King they taste, to know
How to each ill God plants a cure below.

XLI.

Long mused the anxious hero, if to dare
Once more the fearful sea—or from the bark
Shape rugged huts, and wait, slow-lingering there,
Till Eos issuing from the gates of Dark
Unlock the main? dread choice on either hand—
The liquid Acheron, or the Stygian land.

XLII.

At length, resolved to seize the refuge given,
Once more he leads the sturdiest of the crew
Back to the wreck—the planks, asunder riven,
And such scant stores as yet the living few
May for new woes sustain, are shoreward borne;
And hasty axes shape the homes forlorn.

* Herbs which act as the antidotes to the scurvy (the cochlearia, &c.) are found under the snows, when all other vegetation seems to cease.

XLIII.

Now, every chink closed on the deathful air,
In the dark cells the weary labourers sleep;
Deaf to the fierce roar of the hungering bear,
And the dull thunders clanging on the deep—
Till on their waking sense the discords peal,
And to the numb hand cleaves unfelt the steel.

XLIV.

What boots long told the tale of life one war
With the relentless iron Element?
More, day by day, the mounting snows debar
Ev'n search for food,—yet oft the human scent
Lures the wild beast, which, mangling while it dies,
Bursts on the prey, to fall itself the prize!

XLV.

But as the winter deepens, ev'n the beast
Shrinks from its breath, and with the loneliness
To Famine leaves the solitary feast.
Suffering halts patient in its last excess.
Closed in each fireless, lightless, foodless cave
Cowers a dumb ghost unconscious of its grave.

XLVI.

Nature hath stricken down in that waste world
All—save the Soul of Arthur! *That*, sublime,
Hung on the wings of heavenward faith unfurl'd,
O'er the far light of the predicted Time;
Believe thôu hast a mission to fulfil,
And human valour grows a Godhead's will!

XLVII.

Calm to that fate above the moment given
Shall thy strong soul divinely dreaming go,
Unconscious as an eagle, entering heaven,
Where its still shadow skims the rocks below;
High beyond this, its actual world is wrought,
And its true life is in its sphere of thought.

XLVIII.

Yet who can 'scape the infection of the heart?
Who, tho' himself invulnerably steel'd,
Can boast a breast indifferent to the dart
That threats the life his love in vain would shield?
When some large nature, curious, we behold
How twofold comes it from the glorious mould!

XLIX.

How lone, and yet how living in the All!
While it *imagines* how aloof from men!
How like the ancestral Adam ere the fall,
In Eden bowers the painless denizen!
But when it *feels*—the lonely heaven resign'd—
How social moves the man among mankind!

L.

Forth from the tomblike hamlet strays the King,
Restless with ills from which himself is free;
In that dun air the only living thing,
He skirts the margin of the soundless sea;
No—not alone, the musing Wanderer strays;
For still the Dove smiles on the dismal ways.

LI.

Nor can tongue tell, nor thought conceive how far
Into that storm-beat heart, the gentle bird
Had built the halcyon's nest. How precious are
In desolate hours, the Affections!—How, unheard
Mid Noon's melodious myriads of delight,
Thrills the lone note that steals the gloom from night!

LII.

And, in return, a human love replying
To his caress, seem'd in those eyes to dwell,
That mellow murmur, like a human sighing,
Seemed from those founts that lie i' the heart to swell.
Love wants not speech; from silence speech it builds,
Kindness like light speaks in the air it gilds.

LIII.

That angel guide! His fate while leading on,
It followed each quick movement of his soul.
As the soft shadow from the setting sun
Precedes the splendour passing to its goal,
Before his path the gentle herald glides,
Its life reflected from the life it guides.

LIV.

Was Arthur sad? how sadden'd seemed the Dove!
Did Arthur hope? how gaily soared its wings!
Like to that sister spirit left above,
The half of ours, which, torn asunder, springs
Ever thro' space, yearning to join once more
The earthlier half, its own and Heaven's before*;

* In allusion to the well-known Platonic fancy, that love is the yearning of the soul for the twin soul with which it was united in a former existence,

LV.

Like an embodied living Sympathy
Which hath no voice and yet replies to all
That wakes the lightest smile, the faintest sigh,—
So did the instinct and the mystery thrall
To the earth's son the daughter of the air;
And pierce his soul—to place the sister there.

LVI.

She was to him as to the bard his muse,
The solace of a sweet confessional;
The hopes—the fears which manly lips refuse
To speak to man,—those leaves of thought that fall
With every tremulous zephyr from the Tree
Of Life, whirl'd from us down the darksome sea;—

LVII.

Those hourly springs and winters of the heart
Weak to reveal to Reason's sober eye,
The proudest yet will to the muse impart
And grave in song the record of a sigh.
And hath the muse no symbol in the Dove?—
Both give what youth most miss'd in human love!

LVIII.

Over the world of winter strays the King,
Seeking some track of hope—some savage prey
Which, famish'd, fronts and feeds the famishing;
Or some dim outlet in the darkling way
From the dumb grave of snows which form with snows
Wastes wide as realms thro' which a spectre goes.

and which it instinctively recognizes below. Schiller, in one of his earlier poems, has enlarged on this idea with earnest feeling and vigorous fancy.

LIX.

Amazed he halts:—Lo, on the rimy layer
That clothes sharp peaks—the print of human feet!
An awe thrill'd thro' him, and thus spoke in prayer,
"Thee, God, in man once more then do I greet?
Hast thou vouchsafed the brother to the brother,
Links which reweave thy children to each other?

LX.

"Be they the rudest of the clay divine,
Warmed with the breath of soul, how faint so ever,
Yea, tho' their race but threat new ills to mine,
All hail the bond thy sons cannot dissever!
Bowed to thy will, of life or death dispose,
But if not human friends, grant human foes!"

LXI.

Thus while he prayed, blithe from his bosom flew
The guiding Dove, along the frozen plain
Of a mute river, winding vale-like thro'
Rocks lost in vapour from the voiceless main.
And as the man pursues, more thickly seen,
The foot-prints tell where man before has been.

LXII.

Sudden a voice—a yell, a whistling dart!
Dim thro' the fog, behold a dwarf-like band,
(As from the inner earth, its goblins,) start;
Here threatening rush, there hoarsely gibbering stand!
Halts the firm hero; mild but undismay'd,
Grasps the charm'd hilt, but will not bare the blade.

LXIII.

And, with a kingly gesture eloquent,
Seems to command the peace, not shun the fray;
Daunted they back recoil, yet not relent;
As Indians round the forest lord at bay,
Beyond his reach they form the deathful ring,
And every shaft is fitted to the string.

LXIV.

When in the circle a grand shape appears,
Day's lofty child amid those dwarfs of Night,
Ev'n thro' the hides of beasts, (its garb,) it rears
The glorious aspect of a son of light.
Hush'd at that presence was the clamouring crowd;
Dropp'd every hand and every knee was bow'd.

LXV.

Forth stepped the man, advancing towards the King;
And his own language smote the Cymrian's ear,
"What fates, unhappy one, a stranger bring
To shores,"—he started, stopped,—and bounded near;
Gazed on that front august, a moment's space,—
Rush'd,—lock'd the wanderer in a long embrace;

LXVI.

Weeping and laughing in a breath, the cheek,
The lip he kiss'd—then kneeling, clasp'd the hand;
And gasping, sobbing, sought in vain to speak—
Meanwhile the King the beard-grown visage scann'd:
Amazed—he knew his Carduel's comely lord,
And the warm heart to heart as warm restor'd!

LXVII.

Speech came at length: first mindful of the lives
Claiming his care and peril'd for his sake,
Not yet the account that love demands and gives
The generous leader paused to yield and take;
Brief words his follower's wants and woes explain;—
"Light, warmth, and food.—*Sat verbum*," quoth Gawaine.

LXVIII.

Quick to his wondering and Pigmæan troops—
Quick sped the Knight;—he spoke and was obey'd;
Vanish once more the goblin-visaged groups
And soon return caparisoned for aid;
Laden with oil to warm and light the air,
Flesh from the seal, and mantles from the bear.

LXIX.

Back with impatient rapture bounds the King,
Smiling as he was wont to smile of yore;
While Gawaine, blithesome as a bird of spring,
Sends his sweet laughter ringing to the shore;
Runs thro' that maze of questions, "How and Why?"
And lost in joy stops never for reply.

LXX.

Before them rov'd wild dogs too numb to bark,
Led by one civilized, majestic hound,
Who scarcely deign'd his followers to remark,
Save, when they touched him, by a snarl profound;
Teaching that plebs, as history may my readers,
How curs are look'd on by patrician leaders.

LXXI.

Now gained the huts, silent with drowsy life,
That scarcely feels the quick restoring skill;
Trained with stern elements to wage the strife,
The pigmy race are Nature's conquerors still.
With practised hands they chafe the frozen veins,
And gradual loose the chill heart from its chains;

LXXII.

Heap round the limbs the fur's thick warmth of fold,
And with the cheerful oil revive the air.
Slow wake the eyes of Famine to behold
The smiling faces and the proffered fare;
Rank tho' the food, 'tis that which best supplies
The powers exhausted by the withering skies.

LXXIII.

This done, they next the languid sufferers bear
(Wrapp'd from the cold) athwart the vapoury shade,
Regain the vale, and shew the homes that there
Art's earliest god, Necessity, hath made;
Abodes hewn out from winter, winter-proof,
Ice-blocks the walls, and hollow'd ice the roof*!

* The houses of the Esquimaux who received Captain Lyon were thus constructed:—the frozen snow being formed into slabs of about two feet long and half a foot thick; the benches were made with snow, strewed with twigs, and covered with skins; and the lamp suspended from the roof, fed with seal or walrus oil, was the sole substitute for the hearth, furnished light and fire for cooking.

The Esquimaux were known to the settlers and pirates of Norway by the contemptuous name of dwarfs or pigmies—(*Skrællings.*)

LXXIV.

Without, the snowy lavas, hard'ning o'er,
Hide from the beasts the buried homes of men,
But in the dome is placed the artful door
Thro' which the inmate gains or leaves the den.
Down thro' the chasm each lowers the living load,
Then from the winter seals the pent abode.

LXXV.

There ever burns, sole source of warmth and light,
The faithful lamp the whale or walrus gives,
Thus, Lord of Europe, in the heart of Night,
Unjoyous not, thy patient brother lives!
To thee desire, to him possession sent,
Thine worlds of wishes,—his that inch, Content!

LXXVI.

But Gawaine's home, more dainty than the rest,
Betray'd his tastes exotic and luxurious,
The walls of ice in furry hangings drest
Form'd an apartment elegant if curious;
Like some gigantic son of Major Ursa
Turned inside out by barbarous vice versâ.

LXXVII.

Here then he lodged his royal guest and friend,
And, having placed a slice of seal before him,
Quoth he, "Thou ask'st me for my tale, attend;
Then give me thine, *Heus renovo dolorem!*"
Therewith the usage villainous and rough,
Schemed in cold blood by that malignant chough;

LXXVIII.

The fraudful dinner (its dessert a wife;)
The bridal roof with nose-assaulting glaive;
The oak whose leaves with pinching imps were rife;
The atrocious trap into the Viking's cave;
The chief obdurate in his damn'd idea,
Of proving Freedom by a roast to Freya;

LXXIX.

The graphic portrait of the Nuptial goddess;
And diabolic if symbolic spit;
The hierarch's heresy on types and bodies;
And how at last he pos'd and silenc'd it;
All facts traced clearly to that *corvus niger*,
Were told with pathos that had touch'd a tiger,

LXXX.

So far the gentle sympathizing Nine
In dulcet strains have sung Sir Gawaine's woes;
What now remains they bid the historic line
With Dorian dryness unadorned disclose;
So counsel all the powers of fancy stretch,
Then leave the judge to finish off the wretch!

LXXXI.

Along the beach Sir Gawaine and the hound
Roved all the night, and at the dawn of day
Came unawares upon a squadron bound
To fish for whales, arrested in a bay
For want of winds, which certain Norway hags
Had squeezed from heaven and bottled up in bags*.

* A well-known popular superstition, not perhaps quite extinct at this day, amongst the Baltic mariners.

LXXXII.

Straight when the seamen, fretting on the shore,
Behold a wanderer clad as Freya's priest,
They rush, and round him kneeling, they implore
The runes, by which the winds may be releast:
The spurious priest a gracious answer made,
And told them Freya sent him to their aid;

LXXXIII.

Bade them conduct himself and hound on board,
And broil two portions of their choicest meat.
"The spell," quoth he, "our sacred arts afford
To free the wind, is in the food we eat;
We dine, and dining exorcise the witches,
And loose the bags from their infernal stitches.

LXXXIV.

"Haste then, my children, and dispel the wind;
Haste, for the bags are awfully inflating!"
The ship is gain'd. Both priest and dog have din'd;
The crews assembled on the decks are waiting.
A heavier man arose the audacious priest
And stately stepp'd he west and stately east!

LXXXV.

Mutely invoked St. David and St. Brân
To charge a stout north-western with their blessing;
Then cleared his throat and lustily began
A howl of vowels huge from Taliessin.
Prone fell the crews before the thundering tunes,
In words like mountains roll'd the enormous runes!

LXXXVI.

The excited hound, symphonious with the song,
Yell'd as if heaven and earth were rent asunder;
The rocks Orphéan seemed to dance along;
The affrighted whales plunged waves affrighted under;
Polyphlosboian, onwards booming bore
The deaf'ning, strident, rauque, Homeric roar!

LXXXVII.

As lions lash themselves to louder ire,
By his own song the knight sublimely stung
Caught the full œstro of the poet's fire,
And grew more stunning every note he sung!
In each dread blast a patriot's soul exhales,
And Norway quakes before the storm of Wales.

LXXXVIII.

Whether, as grateful Cymri should believe,
That blatant voice heroic burst the bags,
(For sure it might the caves of Boreas cleave
Much more the stitchwork of such losel hags!)
Or heaven, on any terms, resolved on peace;
The wind sprung up before the Knight would cease.

LXXXIX.

Never again hath singer heard such praise
As Gawaine heard; for never since hath song
Found out the secret how the wind to raise!—
Around the charmer now the seamen throng,
And bribe his blest attendance on their toil,
With bales of bear skin and with tuns of oil.

XC.

Well pleased to leave the inhospitable shores,
The artful Knight yet slowly seemed to yield.—
Now thro' the ocean plunge the brazen prores;
They pass the threshold of the world congeal'd;
Surprise the snorting mammoths of the main;
And pile the decks with Pelions of the slain.

XCI.

When, in the midmost harvest of the spoil,
Pounce comes a storm unspeakably more hideous
Than that which drove upon the Lybian soil
Anchises' son, the pious and perfidious,
When whooping Notus, as the Nine assure us,
Rush'd out to play with Africus and Eurus.

XCII.

Torn each from each, or down the maëlstrom whirl'd,
Or grasp'd and gulph'd by the devouring sea,
Or on the ribs of hurrying icebergs hurl'd,
The sundered vessels vanish momently.
Scarce thro' the blasts which swept his own, Gawaine
Heard the crew shrieking "Chaunt the runes again!"

XCIII.

Far other thoughts engaged the prescient knight,
Fast to a plank he lash'd himself and hound;
Scarce done, than, presto, shooting out of sight,
The enormous eddy spun him round and round,
Along the deck a monstrous wave had pour'd,
Caught up the plank and toss'd it overboard.

XCIV.

What of the ship became, saith history not.
What of the man—the man himself shall show.
"Like stone from sling," quoth Gawaine, "I was shot
Into a ridge of what they call a *floe**,
There much amazed, but rescued from the waters,
Myself and hound took up our frigid quarters.

XCV.

"Freed from the plank, drench'd, spluttering, stunn'd, and bruised,
We peer'd about us on the sweltering deep,
And seeing nought, and being much confused,
Crept side by side and nestled into sleep.
The nearest kindred most avoid each other,
So to shun Death, we visited his brother.

XCVI.

"Awaked at last, we found the waves had stranded
A store of waifs portentous and nefarious;
Here a dead whale was at my elbow landed,
There a sick polypus, that sea-Briareus,
Stretch'd out its claws to' incorporate my corpus;
While howl'd the hound half buried by a porpoise!

XCVII.

"Nimbly I rose, disporpoising my friend;—
Around me scattered lay more piteous wrecks,
With every wave the accursed Tritons send
Some sad memento of submergent decks,
Prows, rudders, casks, ropes, blubber, hides, and hooks,
Sailors, salt beef, tubs, cabin boys, and cooks.

* The smaller kind of ice-field is called by the northern whale fishers, 'a floe,'—the name is probably of very ancient date.

XCVIII.

" Graves on the dead, with pious care bestowed,
(Graves in the ice hewn out with mickle pain
By axe and bill, which with the waifs had flowed
To that strange shore) I next collect the gain;
Placed in a hollow cleft—and covered o'er;—
Then knight and hound proceeded to explore.

XCIX.

" Far had we wandered, for the storm had joined
To a great isle of ice, our friend the *floe*,
When as the day (three hours its length!) declined,
Out bray'd a roar; I stared around, and lo
A flight of dwarfs about the size of sea-moths,
Chased by two bears that might have eat behemoths!

C.

" Armed with the axe the Tritons had ejected,
I rush'd to succour the Pigmæan nation,
In strife our valour, I have oft suspected,
Proportions safety to intoxication,
As drunken men securely walk on walls
From which the wretch who keeps his senses falls;

CI.

" Let but the noble frenzy seize the brain,
And strength divine seems breathed into the form;
The rill when swollen swallows up a plain,
The breeze runs mad before it blows a storm,
To do great deeds, first lose your wits,—then do them!
In fine—I burst upon the bears, and slew them!

CII.

"The dwarfs, delivered, kneel, and pull their noses*;
In tugs which mean to say 'the Pigmy Nation
A vote of thanks respectfully proposes
From all the noses of the corporation!'
Your Highness knows '*Magister Artis Venter:*'
On signs for breakfast my replies concenter!

CIII.

"Quick they conceive, and quick obey; the beasts
Are skinn'd, and drawn, and quartered in a trice,
But Vulcan leaves Diana to the feasts,
And not a wood-nymph consecrates the ice—
Bear is but so-so, when 'tis cook'd the best,
But bear just skinn'd and perfectly undrest!

CIV.

"Then I bethink me of the planks and casks
Stowed in the cleft—for fuel *quantum suff:*
I draw the dwarfs—sore chattering, from their tasks,
Choose out the morsels least obdurely tough;
With these I load the Pigmies—bid them follow—
Regain the haven, and review the hollow.

CV.

"But when those minnow-men beheld the whale
It really was a spectacle affecting!
They shout, they sob, they leap—embrace the tail,
Peep in the jaws; then, round me re-collecting,
Draw forth those noselings from their hiding places,
Which serve as public speakers to their faces!

* A salutation still in vogue among certain tribes of the Esquimaux.

CVI.

"While I revolve what this salute may mean,
They rush once more upon the poor balæna,
Clutch—rend—gnaw—bolt the blubber; but the lean
Reject as drying to the duodena!
This done,—my broil they aid me to obtain,
And, while I eat—the noses go again!

CVII.

"My tale is closed—the grateful pigmies lead
Myself and hound across the ice defiles;
Regain their people and recite my deed,
Describe the monsters and display the spoils;
With royal rank my feats the dwarfs repay,
And build the palace which you now survey!

CVIII.

"The vanquish'd bears are trophied on the wall;
The oil you scent once floated in the whale;
I had a vision to illume the hall
With lights less fragrant,—human hopes are frail!
With cares ingenious from the bruins' fat,
I made some candles,—which the ladies ate!

CIX.

"Tis now your turn to tell the tale, Sir King,—
And by the way our comrade, Lancelot?
I hope he found a raven in the ring!
Monstrum horrendum!—Sire, I question not
That in your justice you have heard enough
When we get home—to crucify that chough!"

CX.

"Gawaine," said Arthur, with his sunny smile,
"Methinks thy heart will soon absolve the raven,
Thy friend had perished in this icy isle
But for thy voyage to the Viking's haven,
In every ill which gives thee such offence,
Thou see'st the raven, I the Providence!"

CXI.

The knight reluctant shook his learned head;
"So please you, Sire, you cannot find a thief
Who picks our pouch, but Providence hath led
His steps to pick it;—yet, to my belief,
There's not a judge who'd scruple to exhibit
That proof of Providence upon a gibbet!

CXII.

"The chough was sent by Providence:—Agreed:
We send the chough to Providence, in turn!
Yet in the hound and not the chough, indeed,
Your friendly sight should Providence discern;
For had the hound been just a whit less nimble,
Thanks to the chough, your friend had been a symbol!"

CXIII.

"Thy logic," answered Arthur, "is unsound,
But for the chough thou never had'st been married;
But for the wife thou ne'er hadst seen the hound;—
The *Ab initio* to the chough is carried:
The hound is but the effect—the chough the cause,"
The generous Gawaine murmured his applause.

CXIV.

"*Do veniam Corvo!* Sire, the chough's acquitted!"
"For Lancelot next," quoth Arthur, "be at ease,
The task fulfill'd to which he was permitted,
The ring veered home—I left him on the seas.
Ere this, be sure he hails the Cymrian shore,
And gives to Carduel one great bulwark more."

CXV.

Then Arthur told of fair Genevra flying
From the scorn'd nuptials of the heathen fane;
Her runic bark to his emprize supplying
The steed that bore him to the Northern main;
While she, with cheeks that blush'd and looks that fell,
Implored a Christian's home in Carduel.

CXVI.

The gentle King well versed in woman's heart,
And all the vestal thoughts that tend its shrine,
On Lancelot smiled—and answered, "Maid, depart;
Though o'er our roofs the thunder clouds combine,
Yet love shall guard, whatever war betide,
The Saxon's daughter—or the Cymrian's bride."

CXVII.

A stately ship from glittering Spezia bore
To Cymrian ports the lovers from the King;
Then on, the Seeker of the Shield, once more,
With patient soul pursued the heavenly wing.
Wild tho' that crew, his heart enthralls their own;—
The great are kings wherever they are thrown.

CXVIII.

Nought of that mystery which the Spirit's priest,
True Love, draws round the aisles behind the veil,
Could Arthur bare to that light joyous breast,—
Life hath its inward as its outward tale,
Our lips reveal our deeds,—our sufferings shun;
What we have felt, how few can tell to one!

CXIX.

The triple task—the sword not sought in vain,
The shield yet hidden in the caves of Lok,
Of these spoke Arthur,—"Certes," quoth Gawaine,
When the King ceased—"strange legends of a rock
Where a fierce Dwarf doth guard a shield of light,
Oft have I heard my pigmy friends recite;

CXX.

"Permit me now your royal limbs to wrap,
In these warm relicts of departed bears;
And while from Morpheus you decoy a nap,
My skill the grain shall gather from the tares.
The pigmy tongue my erudite pursuits
Have traced *ad unguem*—to the nasal roots!"

CXXI.

Slumbers the King—slumber his ghastly crew;
How long they know not, guess not—night and dawn
Long since commingled in one livid hue;
Like that long twilight o'er the portals drawn,
Behind whose threshold spreads eternity!—
When the sleep burst, and sudden in the sky

CXXII.

Stands the great Sun!—Like the first glorious breath
Of Freedom to the slave, like Hope upon
The hush of woe, or thro' the mists of death
The pard'ning Angel—comes to earth the Sun!
Ice still on land—still vapour in the air,
But Light—the victor Lord—but Light is there!

CXXIII.

On siege-worn cities, when their war is spent,
From the far hill as, gleam on gleam, arise
The spears of some great aiding armament—
Grow the dim splendours, broadening up the skies,
Till bright and brighter, the sublime array
Flings o'er the world the banners of the Day!

CXXIV.

Behold them where they kneel! the starry King,
The dwarfs of night, the giants of the sea!
Each with the other link'd in solemn ring,
Too blest for words!—Man's sever'd Family,
All made akin once more beneath those eyes
Which on their Father smiled in Paradise!

KING ARTHUR.

BOOK X.

ARGUMENT.

The Polar Spring—The Boreal Lights—and apparition of a double sun—The Rocky Isle—The Bears—The mysterious Shadow from the Crater of the extinct Volcano—The Bears scent the steps of Man: their movements described—Arthur's approach—The Bears emerge from their coverts—The Shadow takes form and life—The Demon Dwarf described—His parley with Arthur—The King follows the Dwarf into the interior of the volcanic rock—The Antediluvian Skeletons—The Troll-Fiends and their tasks—Arthur arrives at the Cave of Lok—The Corpses of the armed Giants—The Valkyrs at their loom—The Wars that they weave—The Dwarf addresses Arthur—The King's fear—He approaches the sleeping Fiend, and the curtains close around him—Meanwhile Gawaine and the Norwegians have tracked Arthur's steps on the snow, and arrive at the Isle—Are attacked by the Bears—The noises and eruption from the Volcano—The re-appearance of Arthur—The change in him—Freedom, and its characteristics—Arthur and his band renew their way along the coast; ships are seen—How Arthur obtains a bark from the Rugen Chieftain; and how Gawaine stores it—The Dove now leads homeward—Arthur reaches England; and, sailing up a river, enters the Mercian territory—He follows the Dove through a forest to the ruins built by the earliest Cimmerians—The wisdom and civilization of the ancestral Druidical races, as compared with their idolatrous successors at the time of the Roman Conquerors, whose remains alone are left to our age—Arthur lies down to rest amidst the moonlit ruins—The Dove vanishes—The nameless horror that seizes the King.

BOOK X.

I.

SPRING on the Polar Seas!—not violet-crown'd
By dewy Hours, nor to cerulean halls
Melodious hymn'd, yet Light itself around
Her stately path, sheds starry coronals.
Sublime she comes, as when, from Dis set free,
Came, through the flash of Jove, Persephoné:

II.

She comes—that grand Aurora of the North!
By steeds of fire her glorious chariot borne,
From Boreal courts the meteors flaming forth,
Ope heav'n on heav'n, before the mighty Morn.
And round the rebel giants of the night
On Earth's last confines bursts the storm of light.

III.

Wonder and awe! lo, where against the Sun
A second Sun* his lurid front uprears!
As if the first-born lost Hyperion,
Hurl'd down of old, from his Uranian spheres,
Rose from the hell-rocks on his writhings pil'd,
And glared defiance on his Titan child.

* The apparition of two or more suns in the polar firmament is well known. Mr. Ellis saw six—they are most brilliant at day-break—and though diminished in splendour, are still visible even after the appearance of the real sun.

IV.

Now life, the polar life, returns once more,
The reindeer roots his mosses from the snows;
The whirring sea-gulls shriek along the shore;
Thro' oozing rills the cygnet gleaming goes;
And, where the ice some happier verdure frees,
Laugh into light frank-eyed anemones.

V.

Out from the seas still solid, frown'd a lone
Chaos of chasm and precipice and rock,
There, while the meteors on their revels shone,
Growling hoarse glee, in many a grauly flock,
With their huge young, the sea-bears sprawling play'd
Near the charr'd crater, some mute Hecla made.

VI.

Sullen before that cavern's vast repose,
Like the lorn wrecks of a despairing race
Chased to their last hold by triumphant foes,
Darkness and Horror stood! But from the space
Within the cave, and o'er the ice-ground wan,
Quivers a Shadow vaguely mocking man.

VII.

Like man's the Shadow falls, yet falling loses
The shape it took, each moment changefully;
As when the wind on Runic waves confuses
The weird boughs toss'd from some prophetic tree.
Fantastic, goblin-like, and fitful thrown,
Comes the strange Shadow from the drear Unknown.

VIII.

It is *not* man's—for they, man's savage foes,
Whose sense ne'er fails them when the scent is blood,
Sport in the shadow the Unseen One throws,
Nor hush their young to sniff the human food;
But, undisturbed as if their home were there,
Pass to and fro the light-defying lair.

IX.

So the bears gamboll'd, so the Shadow play'd,
When sudden halts the uncouth merriment.
Now man—in truth, draws near, man's steps invade
The men-devourers!—Snorting to the scent,
Lo, where they stretch dread necks of shaggy snow,
Grin with white fangs, and greed the blood to flow!

X.

Grotesquely undulating, moves the flock,
Low grumbling as the grisly ranks divide;
Some heave their slow bulk peering up the rock,
Some stand erect, and shift from side to side
The keen quick ear, the red dilating eye,
And steam the hard air with a hungry sigh.

XI.

At length unquiet and amazed—as rings
On to their haunt direct, the dauntless stride,
With the sharp instinct of all savage things
That doubt a prey by which they are defied,
They send from each to each a troubled stare,
And huddle close, suspicious of the snare.

XII.

Then a huge leader, with concerted wile,
Creeps lumbering on, and, to his guidance slow
The shaggëd armies move, in cautious file;
Till one by one, in ambush for the foe,
Drops into chasm and cleft,—and vanishing
With stealthy murther girds the coming King!

XIII.

He comes,—the Conqueror in the Halls of Time,
Known by his silver herald in the Dove,
By his imperial tread, and front sublime
With power as tranquil as the lids of Jove,—
All shapes of death the realms around afford:—
From Fiends God guard him!—from all else his sword!

XIV.

For he, with spring the huts of ice had left
And the small People of the world of snows:
Their food the seal, their camp at night, the cleft,
His bold Norwegians follow where he goes;
Now in the rear afar, their chief they miss,
And grudge the danger which they deem a bliss.

XV.

Ere yet the meteors from the morning sky
Chased large Orion,—in the hour when sleep
Reflects its ghost-land stillest on the eye,
Had stol'n the lonely King; and o'er the deep
Sought by the clue the dwarfmen-legends yield,
And the Dove's wing—the demon-guarded Shield.

XVI.

The Desert of the Desolate is won.
Still lurks, unseen, the ambush horrible—
Nought stirs around beneath the twofold sun
Save that strange Shadow, where before it fell,
Still falling;—varying, quivering to and fro,
From the black cavern on the glaring snow.

XVII.

Slow the devourers rise, and peer around:
Now crag and cliff move dire with savage life,
And rolling downward,—all the dismal ground
Shakes with the roar and bristles with the strife:
Not unprepared—(when ever are the brave?)
Stands the firm King, and bares the diamond glaive.

XVIII.

Distinct thro' all the meteors, streams the brand,
Light'ning along the air, the sea, the rock,
Bright as the arrow in that heavenly hand
Which slew the Python! Blinded halt the flock,
And the great roar, but now so rough and high,
Sinks into terror wailing timidly.

XIX.

Yet the fierce instinct and the rabid sting
Of famine goad again the check'd array;
And close and closer in tumultuous ring,
Reels on the death-mass crushing towards its prey.
A dull groan tells where first the falchion sweeps—
When into shape the cave-born Shadow leaps!

XX.

Out from the dark it leapt—the awful form!
Manlike, but sure not human! on its hair
The ice-barbs bristled: like a coming storm
The breath smote lifeless every wind in air;
Dread form deform'd, as, ere the birth of Light,
Some son of Chaos and the Antique Night!

XXI.

At once a dwarf and giant—trunk and limb
Knit in gnarl'd strength as by a monstrous chance,
Never chimera more grotesque and grim,
Paled Ægypt's priesthood with its own romance,
When, from each dire delirium Fancy knows,
Some Typhon-type of Powers destroying rose.

XXII.

At the dread presence, ice a double cold
Conceived; the meteors from their dazzling play
Paused; and appalled into their azure hold
Shrunk back with all their banners; not a ray
Broke o'er the dead sea and the doleful shore,
Winter's steel grasp lock'd the dumb world once more.

XXIII.

Halted the war—as the wild multitude
Left the King scatheless, and their leaders slain;
And round the giant dwarf the baleful brood
Came with low howls of terror, wrath, and pain,
As children round their father. *They* depart,
But strife remains; Fear and the Human Heart;

XXIV.

For Fear was on the bold! Then spoke aloud
The horrent Image. "Child of hateful Day,
What madness snares thee to the glooms that shroud
The realms abandoned to my secret sway?
Why on mine air first breathes the human breath?
Hath thy far world no fairer path to Death?"

XXV.

"All ways to Death, but one to Glory leads,
That which alike thro' earth, or air, or wave,
Bears a bold thought to goals in noble deeds,"
Said the pale King. "And this, methinks, the cave
Which hides the Shield that rock'd the sleep of one
By whom ev'n Fable shows what deeds were done!

XXVI.

"I seek the talisman which guards the free,
And tread where erst the Sire of freemen trod*."
"Ho!" laugh'd the dwarf, "Walhalla's child was He!
Man gluts the fiend when he assumes the god."—
"No god, Deceiver, tho' man's erring creeds
Make gods of men when godlike are their deeds;

XXVII.

"And if the Only and Eternal One
Hath, ere his last illuminate Word Reveal'd,
Left some grand Memory on its airy throne,
Nor smote the nations when to names they kneel'd—
It is that each false god was some great truth!—
To races Heroes are as Bards to youth!"

* THOR'S visit to the realms of Hela and Lok forms a prominent incident in the romance of Scandinavian mythology.

XXVIII.

Thus spoke the King, to whom the Enchanted Lake,
Where from all sources Wisdom ever springs,
Had given unknown the subtle powers that wake
Our intuitions into cloudiest things,
Won but by those, who, after passionate dreams,
Taste the sharp herb and dare the solemn streams.

XXIX.

The Demon heard; and as a moon that shines,
Rising behind Arcturus, cold and still
O'er Baltic headlands black with rigid pines,—
So on his knit and ominous brows a chill
And livid smile, revealed the gloomy night,
To leave the terror sterner for the light.

XXX.

Thus spoke the Dwarf, "Thou would'st survive to tell
Of trophies wrested from the halls of Lok,
Yet wherefore singly face the hosts of Hell?
Return, and lead thy comrades to the rock;
Never to one, on earth's less dreadful field,
The prize of chiefs do War's fierce Valkyrs yield."

XXXI.

"War," said the King, "is waged on mortal life
By men with men;—*that*, dare I with the rest:
In conflicts awful with no human strife,
Mightiest methinks, that soul the loneliest!
When starry charms from Afrite caves were won,
No Judah march'd with dauntless Solomon!"

XXXII.

Fell fangs the demon gnash'd, and o'er the crowd
Wild cumbering round his feet, with hungry stare
Greeding the man, his drooping visage bowed;
"Go elsewhere, sons—your prey escapes the snare:
Yours but the food which flesh to flesh supplies;
Here not the mortal but the soul defies."

XXXIII.

Then striding to the cave, he plung'd within;
"Follow," he cried, and like a prison'd blast
Along the darkness, the reverberate din,
Roll'd from the rough sides of the viewless Vast;
As goblin echoes, thro' the haunted hollow,
'Twixt groan and laughter, chim'd hoarse-gibbering
"Follow!"

XXXIV.

The King recoiling paused irresolute,
Till thro' the cave the white wing went its way;
Then on his breast he sign'd the cross, and mute
With solemn prayer, he left the world of day.
Thick stood the night, save where the falchion gave
Its clear sharp glimmer lengthening down the cave.

XXXV.

Advancing; flashes rush'd irregular
Like subterranean lightning, fork'd and red:
From warring matter—wandering shot the star
Of poisonous gases; and the tortured bed
Of the' old Volcano show'd in trailing fires,
Where the numb'd serpent dragged its mangled spires.

XXXVI.

Broader and ruddier on the Dove's pale wings
Now glowed the lava of the widening spaces;
Grinn'd from the rock the jaws of giant things,
The lurid skeletons of vanished races,
They who, perchance ere man himself had birth,
Ruled the moist slime of uncompleted earth.

XXXVII.

Enormous couch'd fang'd Iguanodon*,
To which the monster-lizard of the Nile
Were prey too small,—whose dismal haunts were on
The swamps where now such golden harvests smile
As had sufficed those myriad hosts to feed
When all the Orient march'd behind the Mede.

XXXVIII.

There the foul, earliest reptile spectra lay,
Distinct as when the chaos was their home;
Half plant, half serpent, some subside away
Into gnarl'd roots (now stone)—more hideous some,
Half bird—half fish—seem struggling yet to spring,
Shark-like the maw, and dragon-like the wing.

* DR. MANTELL, in his *Wonders of Geology*, computes the length of the Iguanodon (formerly an inhabitant of the Wealds of Sussex) at 100 feet.

XXXIX.

But, life-like more, from later layers emerge
With their fell tusks deep-stricken in the stone,
Herds*, that thro' all the thunders of the surge,
Had to the Ark which swept relèntless on
(Denied to them)—knell'd the despairing roar
Of sentenced races time shall know no more.

XL.

Under the limbs of mammoths went the path,
Or thro' the arch immense of Dragon jaws,
And ever on the King—in watchful wrath
Gaz'd the attendant Fiend, with artful pause
Where dread was dreadliest; had the mortal one
Faltered or quail'd, the Fiend his prey had won,

XLI.

And rent it limb by limb; but on the Dove
Arthur look'd steadfast, and the Fiend was foil'd.
Now, as along the skeleton world they move,
Strange noises jar, and flit strange shadows. Toil'd
The Troll's† swart people, in their inmost home
At work on ruin for the days to come.

* The Deinotherium—supposed to have been a colossal species of hippopotamus.

† In Scandinavian mythology, the evil spirits are generally called Trolls (or Trolds). The name is here applied to the malignant race of Dwarfs, whose homes were in the earth, and who could not endure the sun.

XLII.

A baleful race, whose anvils forge the flash
Of iron murder for the limbs of war;
Who ripen hostile embryos, for the crash
Of earthquakes rolling slow to towers afar;
Or train from Hecla's fount the lurid rills,
To cities sleeping under shepherd hills;

XLIII.

Or nurse the seeds, thro' patient ages rife
With the full harvest of that crowning fire,
When for the sentenced Three,—Time, Death, and Life
Our globe itself shall be the funeral pyre;
And, awed in orbs remote some race unknown
Shall miss one star, whose smile had lit their own!

XLIV.

Thro' the Phlegræan glare, innumerous eyes,
Fierce with the murther-lust, scowl ravening,
And forms on which had never look'd the skies
Stalk near and nearer, swooping round the King,
Till from the blazing sword the foul array
Shrink back, and wolf-like follow on the way.

XLV.

Now thro' waste mines of iron, whose black peaks
Frown o'er dull Phlegethons of fire below,
While, vague as worlds unform'd, sulphureous reeks
Roll on before them huge and dun,—they go.
Abrupt the vapours vanish, and the light
Bursts like a flood and rushes o'er the night.

XLVI.

A mighty cirque with lustre belts the mine;
Its walls of iron glittering into steel;
Wall upon wall reflected flings the shine
Of armour! Vizorless the Corpses kneel,
Their glaz'd eyes fixed upon a couch where, screen'd
With whispering curtains, sleeps the Kingly Fiend:

XLVII.

Corpses of giants, who perchance had heard
The tromps of Tubal, and had leapt to strife,
Whose guilt provoked the Deluge: sepulchred
In their world's ruins, still a frown like life
Hung o'er vast brows,—and spears like turrets shone
In hands whose grasp had crush'd the Mastodon.

XLVIII.

Around the couch, a silent solemn ring,
They whom the Teuton call the Valkyrs, sate.
Shot thro' pale webs their spindles glistening;
Dread tissues woven out of human hate
For heavenly ends!—for there is spun the woe
Of every war that ever earth shall know.

XLIX.

Below their feet a bottomless pit of gore
Yawned, where each web, when once the woof was done,
Was scornful cast. Yet rising evermore
Out of the surface, wandered airy on
(Till lost in upper space) pale wingëd seeds
The future heaven-fruit of the hell-born deeds;

L.

For out of every evil born of time,
God shapes a good for his eternity.
Lo where the spindles, weaving crime on crime,
Form the world-work of Charlemains to be;—
How in that hall of iron lengthen forth
The fates that ruin, to rebuild, the North!

LI.

Here, one stern Sister smiling on the King,
Hurries the thread that twines his Nation's doom,
And, farther down, the whirring spindles sing
Around the woof which from his Baltic home
Shall charm the avenging Norman, to control
The shattered races into one calm whole.

LII.

Already here, the hueless lines along,
Grows the red creed of the Arabian horde;
Already here, the arm'd Chivalric Wrong
Which made the cross the symbol of the sword,
Which thy worst idol, Rome, to Judah gave,
And worshipp'd Mars upon the Saviour's grave!

LIII.

Already the wild Tartar in his tents,
Dreamless of thrones—and the fierce Visigoth *
Who on Colombia's golden armaments . . .
Shall loose the hell-hounds,—nurse the age-long growth
Of Desolation—as the noiseless skein
Clasps in its web, thy far descendants, Cain!

* Visigoth, *poetice* for the Spanish Ravagers of Mexico and Peru.

LIV.

Already, in the hearts of sires remote
In their rude Isle, the spell ordains the germ
Of what shall be a Name of wonder, wrought
From that fell feast which Glory gives the worm,
When Rome's dark bird shall shade with thunder wings
Calm brows that brood the doom of breathless kings*!

LV.

Already, tho' the sad unheeded eyes
Of Bards alone forsee, and none believe,
The lightning, hoarded from the farthest skies,
Into the mesh the race-destroyers weave,
When o'er our marts shall graze a stranger's fold,
And the new Tarshish rot, as rots the old.

LVI.

Yea, ever there, each spectre hand the birth
Weaves of a war—until the angel-blast
(Peal'd from the tromp that knells the doom of earth)
Shall start the livid legions from their last;
And man, with arm uplifted still to slay,
Reel on some Alp that rolls in smoke away!

LVII.

Fierce glared the dwarf upon the silent King,
"There is the prize thy visions would achieve!
There, where the hush'd inexorable ring
Murder the myriads in the webs they weave,
Behind the curtains of Incarnate War,
Whose lightest tremour topples thrones afar,—

* Napoleon.

LVIII.

"Which ev'n the Valkyrs with their bloodless hands
Ne'er dare aside to draw,—go, seek the Shield!
Yet be what follows known!—yon kneeling bands
Whose camps were Andes, and whose battle-field
Left plains, now empires, rolling seas of gore,
Shall hear the clang and leap to life once more.

LIX.

"Roused from their task, revengful shall arise
The never baffled 'Choosers of the Slain,'
The Fiend thy hand shall wake, unclose the eyes
That flash'd on heavenly hosts their storms again,
And thy soul wither in the mighty frown
Before whose night, an earlier sun sunk down.

LX.

"The rocks shall close all path for flight save one,
Where now the Troll-fiends wait to rend their prey,
And each malign and monster skeleton,
Re-clothed with life as in the giant day
When yonder seas were valleys—scent thy gore
And grin with fangs that gnash for food once more.

LXI.

"Ho, dost thou shudder, pale one? Back and live."
Thrice strove the King for speech, and thrice in vain,
For he was man, and till our souls survive
The instincts born of flesh, shall Horror reign
In that Unknown beyond the realms of Sense,
Where the soul's darkness seems the man's defence.

LXII.

Yet as when thro' uncertain troublous cloud
Breaks the sweet morning star, and from its home
Smiles lofty peace, so thro' the phantom crowd
Of fears—the Eos of the world to come,
FAITH, look'd—revealing how earth-nourish'd are
The clouds; and how beyond their reach the star!

LXIII.

Mute on his knee, amidst the kneeling dead
He sank—the dead the dreaming fiend revered,
And he, the living, God! Then terror fled,
And all the king illumed the front he reared.
Firm to the couch on which the fiend reposed
He strode;—the curtains, murmuring, round him closed.

LXIV.

Now while this chanced, without the tortured rock
Raged fierce the war between the rival might
Of beast and man; the dwarf king's ravenous flock
And Norway's warriors led by Cymri's knight.
For by the foot-prints thro' the snows explor'd,
On to the rock the bands had track'd their lord.

LXV.

Repell'd, not conquered, back to crag and cave,
Sullen and watchful still, the monsters go;
And solitude resettles on the wave,
But silence not; around, aloft, alow
Roar the couch'd beasts, and answering from the main,
Shrieks the shrill gull and booms the dismal crane.

LXVI.

And now the rock itself from every tomb
Of its dead world within, sends voices forth,
Sounds direr far, than in its rayless gloom
Crash on the midnight of the farthest North.
From beasts our world hath lost, the strident yell,
The shout of giants and the laugh of hell.

LXVII.

Reels all the isle; and every ragged steep
Hurls down an avalanche;—all the crater-cave
Glows into swarthy red, and fire-showers leap
From rended summits, hissing to the wave
Thro' its hard ice; or in huge crags, wide-sounding
Spring where they crash—on rushing and rebounding.

LXVIII.

Dizzy and blind, the staggering Northmen fall
On earth that rocks beneath them like a bark;
Loud and more loud the tumult swells with all
The Acheron of the discord. Swift and dark
From every cleft the smoke-clouds burst their way,
Rush thro' the void, and sweep from heaven the day.

LXIX.

Smitten beneath the pestilential blast
And the great terror, senseless lay the band,
Till the arrested life, with throes at last,
Gasp'd back: and holy over sea and land
Silence and light reposed. They looked above,
And calm in calmëd air beheld the Dove!

LXX.

And o'er their prostrate lord was poised the wing;
And when they rush'd and reach'd him, shouting joy,
There came no answer from the corpselike King;
And when his true knight raised him, heavily
Drooped his pale front upon the faithful breast,
And the clos'd lids seemed leaden in their rest.

LXXI.

And all his mail was dinted, hewn, and crush'd,
And the bright falchion dim with foul dark gore;
And the strong pulse of the strong hand was hush'd;
Like a spent storm, that might, which seemed before
Charg'd with the bolts of Jove, now from the sky
Drew breath more feeble than an infant's sigh.

LXXII.

And there was solemn change on that fair face,
Nor, whatsoe'er the fear or scorn had been,
Did the past passion leave its haggard trace;
But on the rigid beauty awe was seen,
As one who on the Gorgon's aspect fell,
Had gazed, and freezing, yet survived the spell!

LXXIII.

Not by the chasm in which he left the day,
But through a new-made gorge the fires had cleft,
As if with fires, themselves, were forced the way,
Had rush'd the King;—and sense and sinew left
The form that struggled till the strife was o'er;
So faints the swimmer when he gains the shore.

LXXIV.

But on his arm was clasp'd the wondrous prize,
Dimm'd, tarnished, grimed, and black with gore and smoke,
Still the pure metal, thro' each foul disguise,
Like starlight scattered on dark waters, broke;
Thro' gore, thro' smoke it shone—the silver Shield,
Clear as dawns Freedom from her battle-field!

LXXV.

Days followed days, ere from that speechless trance
(Borne to green inlets isled amid the snows
Where led the Dove), the King's reviving glance
Look'd languid round on watchful, joyful brows;
Ev'n while he slept, new flowers the earth had given,
And on his heart brooded the bird of heaven!

LXXVI.

But ne'er as voice and strength and sense returned,
To his good knight the strife that won the Shield
Did Arthur tell; deep in his soul inurned
(As in the grave its secret) nor reveal'd
To mortal ear—that mystery which for ever
Flowed thro' his thought, as thro' the cave a river;

LXXVII.

Whether to Love, how true soe'er its faith,
Whether to Wisdom, whatso'er its skill,
Till his last hour the struggle and the scathe
Remained unuttered and unutterable;
But aye, in solitude, in crowds, in strife,
In joy, that memory lived within his life:

LXXVIII.

It made not sadness, tho' the calm grave smile
Never regained the flash that youth had given,—
But as some shadow from a sacred pile
Darkens the earth from shrines that speak of heaven,
That gloom the grandeur of religion wore,
And seemed to hallow all it rested o'er.

LXXIX.

Such Freedom is, O Slave, that would be free!
Never her real struggles into life
Hath History told! As it hath been shall be
The Apocalypse of Nations; nursed in strife
Not with the present, nor with living foes,
But where the centuries shroud their long repose.

LXXX.

Out from the graves of earth's primæval bones,
The shield of empire, patient Force must win:
What made the Briton free? not crashing thrones
Nor parchment laws? The charter must begin
In Scythian tents, the steel of Nomad spears;
To date the freedom, count three thousand years!

LXXXI.

Neither is Freedom mirth! Be free, O slave,
And dance no more beneath the lazy palm.
Freedom's mild brow with noble care is grave,
Her bliss is solemn as her strength is calm;
And thought mature each childlike sport debars
The forms erect whose look is on the stars.

LXXXII.

Now as the King revived, along the seas
Flowed back, enlarged to life, the lapsing waters,
Kiss'd from their slumber by the loving breeze,
Glide, in light dance, the Ocean's silver daughters—
And blithe and hopeful, o'er the sunny strands,
Listing the long-lost billow, rove the bands.

LXXXIII.

At length, O sight of joy!—the gleam of sails
Bursts on the solitude! more near and near
Come the white playmates of the buxom gales.—
The whistling cords, the sounds of man, they hear.
Shout answers shout;—light sparkles round the oar—
And from the barks the boat skims on to shore.

LXXXIV.

It was a race from Rugen's friendly soil,
Leagued by old ties with Cymri's land and king,
Who, with the spring time, to their wonted spoil
Of seals and furs had spread the canvas wing
To bournes their fathers never yet had known;—
And found amazed, hearts bolder than their own.

LXXXV.

Soon to the barks the Cymrians and their bands
Are borne: Bright-hair'd, above the gazing crews,
Lone on the loftiest deck, the leader stands,
To whom the King (his rank made known) renews
All that his tale of mortal hope and fear
Vouchsafes from truth to thrill a mortal's ear;

LXXXVI.

And from the barks whose sails the chief obey,
Craves one to waft where yet the fates may guide.—
With rugged wonder in his large survey,
That calm grand brow the son of Ægir* eyed,
And seemed in awe, as of a god, to scan
Him who so moved his homage, yet was man.

LXXXVII.

Smoothing his voice, rough with accustom'd swell
Above the storms, and the wild roar of war,
The Northman answered, "Skalds in winter tell
Of the dire dwarf who guards the Shield of Thor,
For one whose race, with Odin's blent, shall be,
Lords of the only realm which suits the Free,

LXXXVIII.

"Ocean!—I greet thee, and this strong right hand
Place in thine own to pledge myself thy man.
Choose as thou wilt for thee and for thy band,
Amongst the sea-steeds in the stalls of Ran.
Need'st thou our arms against the Saxon foe?
Our flag shall fly where'er thy trumpets blow!"

LXXXIX.

"Men to be free must free themselves," the King
Replied, proud-smiling. "Every father-land
Spurns from its breast the recreant sons that cling
For hope, to standards winds not their's have fann'd.
Thankful thro' thee our foe we reach;—and then
Cymri hath steel eno' for Cymrian men!"

* Ægir, the God of the Ocean, the Scandinavian Neptune.

XC.

While these converse, Sir Gawaine, with his hound,
Lured by a fragrant and delightsome smell
From roasts—not meant for Freya,—makes his round,
Shakes hands with all, and hopes their wives are well.
From spit to spit with easy grace he walks,
And chines astounded vanish while he talks.

XCI.

At earliest morn the bark to bear the King,
His sage discernment delicately stores,
Rejects the blubber and disdains the ling
For hams of rein-deers and for heads of boars,
Connives at seal, to satisfy his men,
But childless leaves each loud-lamenting hen.

XCII.

And now the bark the Cymrian prince ascends,
The large oars chiming to the chaunting crew,
(His leal Norwegian band) the new-found friends
From brazen trumpets blare their loud adieu.
Forth bounds the ship, and Gawaine, while it quickens,
The wind propitiates—with three virgin chickens.

XCIII.

Led by the Dove, more brightly day by day,
The vernal azure deepens in the sky;
Far from the Polar threshold smiles the way—
And lo, white Albion shimmers on the eye,
Nurse of all nations, who to breasts severe
Takes the rude children, the calm men to rear.

XCIV.

Doubt and amaze with joy perplex the King,
Not yet the task achieved, the mission done,
Why homeward steers the angel pilot's wing?
Of the three labours rests the crowning one;
Unreach'd the Iron Gates—Death's sullen hold—
Where waits the Child-guide with the locks of gold.

XCV.

Yet still the Dove cleaves homeward thro' the air;
Glides o'er the entrance of an inland stream;
And rests at last on bowers of foliage, where
Thick forests close their ramparts on the beam;
And clasp with dipping boughs a grassy creek,
Whose marge slopes level with the brazen beak.

XCVI.

Around his neck the shield the Adventurer slung;
And girt the enchanted sword. Then, kneeling, said
The young Ulysses of the golden tongue,
"Not now to phantom foes the dove hath led;
For, if I err not, this a Mercian haven,
And from the dove peeps forth at last the raven!

XCVII.

"Not lone, nor reckless, in these glooms profound,
Tempt the sure ambush of some Saxon host;
If out of sight, at least in reach of sound,
Let our stout Northmen follow up the coast;
Then if thou wilt, from each suspicious tree
Shake laurels down, but share them, Sire, with me?"

XCVIII.

"Nay," answered Arthur, "ever, as before,
Alone the Pilgrim to his bourne must go;
But range the men concealed along the shore;
Set watch, from these green turrets, for the foe;
Moor'd to the marge where broadest hangs the bough,
Hide from the sun the glitter of the prow;—

XCIX.

And so farewell!" He said; to land he leapt;
And with dull murmur from its verdant waves,
O'er his high crest the billowy forest swept.
As towards some fitful light the swimmer cleaves
His stalwart way,—so thro' the woven shades
Where the pale wing now glimmers and now fades,

C.

With strong hand parting the tough branches, goes
Hour after hour the King; till light at last
From skies long hid, in ambient silver flows
Thro' opening glades,—the length of gloom is past,
And the dark pines receding, stand around
A silent hill with antique ruins crown'd.

CI.

Day had long closed; and from the mournful deeps
Of old volcanoes spent, the livid moon
Which thro' the life of planets lifeless creeps
Her ghostly way, deaf to the choral tune
Of spheres rejoicing, on those ruins old
Look'd down, herself a ruin,—hush'd and cold.

CII.

Mutely the granite wrecks the King survey'd,
And knew the work of hands Cimmerian,
What time in starry robes, and awe, array'd,
Grey Druids spoke the oracles of man—
Solving high riddles to Chaldean Mage,
Or the young wonder of the Samian Sage.

CIII.

A date remounting far beyond the day
When Roman legions met the scythëd cars,
When purer founts sublime had lapsed away
Thro' the deep rents of unrecorded wars,
And bloodstained altars cursed the mountain sod,
Where the first faith had hail'd the only God.

CIV.

For all now left us of the parent Celt,
Is of that later and corrupter time,—
Not in rude domeless fanes those Fathers knelt,
Who lured the Brahman from his burning clime,
Who charm'd lost science from each lone abyss,
And wing'd the shaft of Scythian Abaris*.

* The arrow of Abaris (which bore him where he pleased) is supposed by some to have been the loadstone. And Abaris himself has been, by some ingenious speculators, identified with a Druid philosopher.

CV.

Yea, the grand sires of our primæval race
Saw angel tracks the earlier earth upon,
And as a rising sun, the morning face
Of Truth more near the flush'd horizon shone;
Filling ev'n clouds with many a golden light,
Lost when the orb is at the noonday height.

CVI.

Thro' the large ruins (now no more), the last
Perchance on earth of those diviner sires,
With noiseless step the lone descendant past;
Not there were seen BÂL-HUAN'S amber pyres;
No circling shafts with barbarous fragments strown,
Spoke creeds of carnage to the spectral moon.

CVII.

But art, vast, simple, and sublime, was there
Ev'n in its mournful wrecks,—such art foregone
As the first Builders, when their grand despair
Left Shinar's tower and city half undone,
Taught where they wander'd o'er the newborn world.—
Column, and vault, and roof, in ruin hurl'd,

CVIII.

Still spoke of hands that founded Babylon!
So in the wrecks, the Lord of young Romance
By fallen pillars laid him musing down.
More large and large the moving shades advance,
Blending in one dim silence sad and wan
The past, the present, ruin and the man.

CIX.

Now, o'er his lids life's gentlest influence stole,
Life's gentlest influence yet the likest death!
That nightly proof how little needs the soul
Light from the sense, or being from the breath,
When all life knows a life unknown supplies,
And airy worlds around a Spirit rise.

CX.

Still thro' the hazy mists of stealing sleep,
His eyes explore the watchful guardian's wing,
There, where it broods upon the moss-grown heap,
With plumes that all the stars are silvering.
Slow close the lids—reopening with a start
As shoots a nameless terror thro' his heart.

CXI.

That strange wild awe which haunted Childhood thrills,
When waking at the dead of Dark, alone;
A sense of sudden solitude which chills
The blood;—a shrinking as from shapes unknown;
An instinct both of some protection fled,
And of the coming of some ghastly dread.

CXII.

He looked, and lo, the Dove was seen no more,
Lone lay the lifeless wrecks beneath the moon,
And the one loss gave all that seemed before
Desolate,—twofold desolation!
How slight a thing, whose love our trust has been,
Alters the world, when it no more is seen!

CXIII.

He strove to speak, but voice was gone from him.
As in that loss, new might the terror took,
His veins congeal'd; and, interfused and dim,
Shadow and moonlight swam before his look;
Bristled his hair; and all the strong dismay
Seized as an eagle when it grasps its prey.

CXIV.

Senses and soul confused, and jarr'd, and blent,
Lay crush'd beneath the intolerable Power;
Then over all, one flash, in lightning, rent
The veil between the Immortal and the Hour;
Life heard the voice of unembodied breath,
And Sleep stood trembling face to face with Death.

Note to Book X.

" And blood-stained altars cursed the mountain sod,
Where the first faith had hail'd the only God."

Page 341, stanza CIII.

The testimony to be found in classical writers as to the original purity of the Druid worship, before it was corrupted into the idolatry which existed in Britain at the time of the Roman conquest, is strongly corroborated by the Welch triads. These triads, indeed, are of various dates, but some bear the mark of a very remote antiquity—wholly distinct alike from the philosophy of the Romans, and the mode of thought prevalent in the earlier ages of the Christian era; in short, anterior to all the recorded conquests over the Cymrian people. These, like proverbs, appear the wrecks and fragments of some primæval ethics, or philosophical religion. Nor are such remarkable alone for the purity of the notions they inculcate relative to the Deity; they have often, upon matters less spiritual, the delicate observation, as well as the profound thought, of reflective wisdom. It is easy to see in them, how identified was the Bard with the Sage—that rare union which produces the highest kind of human knowledge. Such, perhaps, are the relics of that sublimer learning which, ages before the sacrifice of victims in wicker-idols, won for the Druids the admiration of the cautious Aristotle, as ranking among the true enlighteners of men—such the teachers who (we may suppose to have) instructed the mystical Pythagoras; and furnished new themes for meditation to the musing Brahman. Nor were the Druids of Britain inferior to those with whom the Sages of the western and eastern world came more in contact. On the contrary, even to the time of Cæsar, the Druids of Britain excelled in science and repute those in Gaul; and to their schools the Neophytes of the Continent were sent.

In the Stanzas that follow the description of the more primitive Cymrians, it is assumed that the rude Druid remains *now* existent (as at Stonehenge, etc.), are coeval only with the later and corrupted state of a people degenerated to idol worship, and that they previously possessed an architecture, of which no trace now remains, more suited to their early civilization. If it be true that they worshipped the Deity only in his own works, and that it was not until what had been a symbol passed into an idol, that they deserted the mountain top and the forest for the temple, they would certainly have wanted the main inducement to permanent and lofty architecture. Still it may be allowed, at least to a poet, to suppose that men so sensible as the primitive Saronides, would have held their schools and colleges in places more adapted to a northern climate than their favourite oak groves.

KING ARTHUR.

BOOK XI.

ARGUMENT.

The Siege of Carduel—The Saxon forces—Stanzas relative to Ludovick the Vandal, in explanation of the failure of his promised aid, and in description of the events in Vandal-land—The preparations of the Saxon host for the final assault on the City, under cover of the approaching night—The state of Carduel—Discord—Despondence—Famine—The apparent impossibility to resist the coming Enemy—Dialogue between Caradoc and Merlin—Caradoc hears his sentence, and is resigned—He takes his harp and descends into the town—The Progress of Song; in its effects upon the multitude—Caradoc's address to the people he has roused, and the rush to the Council Hall—Meanwhile the Saxons reach the walls—The burst of the Cymrians—The Saxons retire into the plain between the Camp and the City, and there take their stand—The battle described—The single combat between Lancelot and Harold—Crida leads on his reserve; the Cymrians take alarm and waver—The prediction invented by the noble devotion of Caradoc—His fate—The enthusiasm of the Cymrians and the retreat of the enemy to their Camp—The first entrance of a Happy Soul into Heaven—The Ghost that appears to Arthur, and leads him through the Cimmerian tomb to the Realm of Death—The sense of time and space are annihilated—Death, the Phantasmal Everywhere—Its brevity and nothingness—The condition of soul is life, whether here or hereafter—Fate and Nature identical—Arthur accosted by his Guardian Angel—After the address of that Angel (which represents what we call Conscience), Arthur loses his former fear both of the realm and the Phantom—He addresses the Ghost, which vanishes without reply to his question—The last boon—The destined Soother—Arthur recovering as from a trance, sees the Maiden of the Tomb—Her description—The Dove is beheld no more—Strange resemblance between the Maiden and the Dove—Arthur is led to his ship, and sails at once for Carduel—He arrives on the Cymrian territory, and lands with Gawaine and the Maiden near Carduel, amidst the ruins of a hamlet devastated by the Saxons—He seeks a convent, of which only one tower, built by the Romans, remains—From the hill top he surveys the walls of Carduel and the Saxon encampment—The appearance of the holy Abbess, who recognizes the King, and conducts him and his companions to the subterranean grottoes built by the Romans for a summer retreat—He leaves the Maiden to the care of the Abbess, and concerts with Gawaine the scheme for attack on the Saxons—The Virgin is conducted to the cell of the Abbess—Her thoughts and recollections, which explain her history—Her resolution—She attempts to escape—Meets the Abbess, who hangs the Cross round her neck, and blesses her—She departs to the Saxon Camp.

BOOK XI.

I.

KING CRIDA'S hosts are storming Carduel!
From vale to mount one world of armour shines,
Round castled piles for which the forest fell,
Spreads the white war town of the Teuton lines;
To countless clarions countless standards swell;
King Crida's hosts are storming Carduel!

II.

There, all its floods the Saxon deluge pours;
All the fierce tribes; from those whose fathers first
With their red seaxes from the southward shores
Carved realms for Hengist, —to the bands that burst
Along the Humber, on the idle wall
Rome built for manhood rotted by her thrall.

III.

There, wild allies from many a kindred race,
In Cymrian lands hail Teuton thrones to be:
Dark Jutland wails her absent populace,—
And large-limb'd sons, his waves no more shall see,
Leave Danube desolate! afar they roam
Where halts the Raven there to find a home!

IV.

But wherefore fail the Vandal's promised bands?
Well said the Greek, 'not till his latest hour
Deem man secure from Fortune;' in our hands
We clutch the sunbeam when we grasp at power;—
No strength detains the unsubstantial prize,
The light escapes us as the moment flies.

V.

And monarchs envied Ludovick the Great!
And Wisdom's seers his wiles did wisdom call,
And Force stood sentry at his castle gate;
And Mammon soothed the murmurers in the hall;
For Freedom's forms disguised the despot's thought—
He ruled by synods—and the synods bought!

VI.

Yet empires rest not or on gold or steel;
The old in habit strike the gnarlëd root;
But vigorous faith—the young fresh sap of zeal,
Must make the life-blood of the planted shoot—
And new-born states, like new religions, need
Not the dull code, but the impassion'd creed.

VII.

Give but a cause, a child may be a chief!
What cause to hosts can Ludovick supply?
Swift flies the Element of Power, *Belief*,
From all foundations hollowed to a lie.
One morn, a riot in the streets arose,
And left the Vandal crownless at the close.

VIII.

A plump of spears the riot could have crush'd!
"Defend the throne, my spearmen!" cried the king.
The spearmen armed, and forth the spearmen rush'd,
When woe! they took to reason on the thing!
And then conviction smote them on the spot,
That for that throne they did not care a jot.

IX.

With scuff and scum, with urchins loosed from school,
Thieves, gleemen, jugglers, beggars, swelled the riot;
While, like the gods of Epicurus, cool
On crowd, and crown—the spearmen looked in quiet,
Till all its heads that Hydra call'd 'The Many,'
Stretch'd hissing forth, without a stroke at any.

X.

At first Astutio, wrong but very wise,
Disdain'd the Hydra as a fabled creature,
The vague invention of a Poet's lies,
Unknown to Pliny and the laws of Nature—
Nor till the fact was past philosophizing,
Saith he, "That's Hydra, there is no disguising!

XI.

"A Hydra, Sire, a Hercules demands,
So if not Hercules, assume his vizard."
The advice is good—the Vandal wrings his hands,
Kicks out the Sage—and rushes to a wizard.
The wizard waves his wand—disarms the sentry,
And (wondrous man) enchants the mob—with entry.

XII.

Thus fell, tho' no man touch'd him, Ludovick,
Tripp'd by the slide of his own slippery feet.
The crown cajol'd from Fortune by a trick,
Fortune, in turn, outcheated from the cheat;
Clapp'd her sly cap the glittering bauble on,
Cried "Presto!"—raised it—and the gaud was gone.

XIII.

Ev'n at the last, to self and nature true,
No royal heart the breath of danger woke;
To mean disguise habitual instinct flew,
And the king vanished in a craftsman's cloak.
While his brave princes scampering for their lives,
Relictis parmulis—forgot their wives!

XIV.

King Mob succeeding to the vacant throne,
Chose for his ministers some wise Chaldeans,—
Who told the sun to close the day at noon,
Nor sweat to death his betters the plebeians:
And bade the earth, unvexed by plough and spade,
Bring forth its wheat in quarterns ready made.

XV.

The sun refused the astronomic fiat;
The earth declined to bake the corn it grew;
King Mob then ordered that a second riot
Should teach Creation what it had to do.
"The sun shines on, the earth demands the tillage,
Down Time and Nature, and hurrah for pillage!"

XVI.

Then rise *en masse* the burghers of the town;
Each patriot breast the fires of Brutus fill;
Gentle as lambs when riot reach'd the crown,
They raged like lions when it touch'd the till.
Rush'd all who boasted of a shop to rob,
And stout King Money soon dethron'd King Mob.

XVII.

This done, much scandalized to note the fact,
That o'er the short tyrannic rise the tall,
The middle-sized a penal law enact
That henceforth height must be the same in all;
For being each born equal with the other,
What greater crime than to outgrow your brother?

XVIII.

Poor Vandals, do the towers, when foes assail,
So idly soar above the level wall?
Harmonious Order needs its music-scale;
The Equal were the discord of the All.
Let the wave undulate, the mountain rise;
Nor ask from Law what Nature's self denies.

XIX.

O vagrant Muse, deserting all too long,
Freedom's grand war for frenzy's goblin dream,
The hour runs on, and redemands from song,
And from our Father-land the mighty theme.
The Pale Horse rushes and the trumpets swell,
King Crida's hosts are storming Carduel!

XX.

Within the inmost fort the pine-trees made,
The hardy women kneel to warrior gods.
For where the Saxon armaments invade,
All life abandons their resign'd abodes.
The tents they pitch the all they prize contain;
And each new march is for a new domain.

XXI.

To the stern gods the fair-hair'd women kneel,
As slow to rest the red sun glides along;
And near and far, hammers, and clanking steel,
Neighs from impatient barbs, and runic song
Mutter'd o'er mystic fires by wizard priests,
Invite the Valkyrs to the raven feasts.

XXII.

For after nine long moons of siege and storm,
Thy hold, Pendragon, trembles to its fall!
Loftier the Roman tower uprears its form,
From the crush'd bastion and the shatter'd wall,
And but till night those iron floods delay
Their rush of thunder:—Blood-red sinks the day.

XXIII.

Death halts to strike, and swift the moment flies:
Within the walls, (than all without more fell,)
Discord with Babel tongues confounds the wise,
And spectral Panic, like a form of hell
Chased by a Fury, fleets,—or, stone-like, stands
Dull-eyed Despondence, palsying nerveless hands.

XXIV.

And Pride, that evil angel of the Celt,
Whispers to all "'tis servile to obey,"
Robs ordered Union of its starry belt,
Rends chief from chief and tribe from tribe away,
And leaves the children wrangling for command
Round the wild death-throes of the Father-land.

XXV.

In breadless marts, the ill-persuading fiend
Famine, stalks maddening with her wolfish stare;
And hearts, on whose stout anchors Faith had lean'd,
Bound at her look to treason from despair,
Shouting, "Why shrink we from the Saxon's thrall?
Is slavery worse than Famine smiting all?"

XXVI.

Thus, in the absence of the sunlike king,
All phantoms stalk abroad; dissolve and droop
Light and the life of nations—while the wing
Of Carnage halts but for its rushing swoop.
Some moan, some rave, some laze the hours away;—
And down from Carduel blood-red sunk the day!

XXVII.

Leaning against a broken parapet
Alone with Thought, mused Caradoc the Bard,
When a voice smote him, and he turned and met
A gaze prophetic in its sad regard.
Beside him, solemn with his hundred years,
Stood the arch hierarch of the Cymrian seers.

XXVIII.

"Dost thou remember," said the Sage, "that hour
When seeking signs to Glory's distant way,
Thou heard'st the night bird in her leafy bower,
Singing sweet death-chaunts to her shining prey,
While thy young poet-heart, with ravished breath,
Hung on the music, nor divin'd the death * ?"

XXIX.

"Ay," the bard answer'd, "and ev'n now methought
I heard again the ambrosial melody!"
"So," sigh'd the Prophet, "to the bard, unsought,
Come the far whispers of Futurity!
Like his own harp, his soul a wind can thrill,
And the chord murmur, tho' the hand be still.

XXX.

"Wilt thou for ever, even from the tomb,
Live, yet a music, in the hearts of all;
Arise and save thy country from its doom;
Arise, Immortal, at the angel's call!
The hour shall give thee all thy life implor'd,
And make the lyre more glorious than the sword.

XXXI.

"In vain thro' yon dull stupour of despair
Sound Geraint's tromp and Owaine's battle cry;
In vain where yon rude clamour storms the air,
The Council Chiefs stem mad'ning mutiny;
From Trystan's mail the lion heart is gone,
And on the breach stands Lancelot alone!

* See Book ii., pp. 45-6, from stanza xxvii. to stanza xxx.

XXXII.

"Drivelling the wise, and impotent the strong;
Fast into night the life of Freedom dies;
Awake Light-Bringer, wake bright soul of song,
Kindler, reviver, re-creator rise!
Crown thy great mission with thy parting breath,
And teach to hosts the Bard's disdain of death!"

XXXIII.

Thrill'd at that voice the soul of Caradoc;
He heard, and knew his glory and his doom.
As when in summer's noon the lightning shock
Smites some fair elm in all its pomp of bloom,
Mid whose green boughs each vernal breeze had play'd,
And air's sweet race melodious homes had made;

XXXIV.

So that young life bow'd sad beneath the stroke
That sear'd the Fresh and still'd the Musical,
Yet on the sadness thought sublimely broke:
Holy the tree on which the bolt doth fall!
Wild flowers shall spring the sacred roots around,
And nightly fairies tread the haunted ground;

XXXV.

There, age by age, shall youth with musing brow,
Hear Legend murmuring of the days of yore;
There, virgin love more lasting deem the vow
Breath'd in the shade of branches green no more;
And kind Religion keep the grand decay
Still on the earth while forests pass away.

XXXVI.

"So be it, O voice from Heaven," the Bard replied,
"Some grateful tears may yet embalm my name,
Ever for human love my youth hath sigh'd,
And human love's divinest form is fame.
Is the dream erring? shall the song remain?
Say, can one Poet ever live in vain?"

XXXVII.

As the warm south on some unfathom'd sea,
Along the Magian's soul, the awful rest
Stirr'd with the soft emotion: tenderly
He laid his hand upon the brows he blest,
And said, "Complete beneath a brighter sun
That course, The Beautiful, which life begun.

XXXVIII.

"Joyous and light, and fetterless thro' all
The blissful, infinite, empyreal space,
If then thy spirit stoopeth to recall
The ray it shed upon the human race,
See where the ray had kindled from the dearth,
Seeds that shall glad the garners of the earth!

XXXIX.

"Never true Poet lived and sung in vain!
Lost if his name, and withered if his wreath,
The thoughts he woke—an element remain
Fused in our light and blended with our breath;
All life more noble, and all earth more fair,
Because that soul refined man's common air*!"

* Perhaps it is in this sense that Taliessin speaks in his mystical poem, called "Taliessin's History," still extant:

"I have been an instructor
To the whole universe.
I shall remain till the day of doom
On the face of the earth."

XL.

Then rose the Bard, and smilingly unslung
His harp of ivory sheen, from shoulders broad,
Kissing the hand that doom'd his life, he sprung
Light from the shatter'd wall,—and swiftly strode
Where, herdlike huddled in the central space,
Droop'd, in dull pause, the cowering populace.

XLI.

There, in the midst he stood! The heavens were pale
With the first stars, unseen amidst the glare
Cast from large pine-brands on the sullen mail
Of listless legions and the streaming hair
Of women, wailing for the absent dead,
Or bow'd o'er infant lips that moan'd for bread.

XLII.

From out the illumed cathedral hollowly
Swell'd, like a dirge, the hymn; and thro' the throng
Whose looks had lost all commerce with the sky,
With lifted rood the slow monks swept along,
And vanish'd hopeless: From those wrecks of man
Fled ev'n Religion:—Then the BARD began.

XLIII.

Slow, pitying, soft it glides, the liquid lay,
Sad with the burthen of the Singer's soul
Into the heart it coil'd its lulling way;
Wave upon wave the golden river stole;
Hush'd to his feet forgetful Famine crept,
And Woe, reviving, veil'd the eyes that wept.

XLIV.

Then stern, and harsh, clash'd the ascending strain,
Telling of ills more dismal yet in store;
Rough with the iron of the grinding chain,
Dire with the curse of slavery evermore;
Wild shrieks from lips belov'd pale warriors hear,
Her child's last death-groan rends the mother's ear;

XLV.

Then trembling hands instinctive griped the swords;
And men unquiet sought each other's eyes;
Loud into pomp sonorous swell the chords,
Like linkëd legions march the melodies;
Till the full rapture swept the Bard along,
And o'er the listeners rush'd the storm of song!

XLVI.

And the Dead spoke! From cairns and kingly graves
The Heroes call'd;—and Saints from earliest shrines;
And the Land spoke!—Mellifluous river-waves;
Dim forests awful with the roar of pines;
Mysterious caves from legend-haunted deeps;
And torrents flashing from untrodden steeps;—

XLVII.

THE LAND OF FREEDOM call'd upon the Free!
All Nature spoke; the clarions of the wind;
The organ swell of the majestic sea;
The choral stars; the Universal Mind
Spoke, like the voice from which the world began,
"No chain for Nature and the Soul of Man!"

XLVIII.

Then loud thro' all, as if mankind's reply,
Burst from the Bard the Cymrian battle hymn!
That song which swell'd the anthems of the Sky,
The Alleluia of the Seraphim;
When Saints led on the Children of the Lord,
And smote the Heathen with the Angel's sword*.

XLIX.

As leaps the warfire on the beacon hills,
Leapt in each heart the lofty flame divine;
As into sunlight flash the molten rills,
Flash'd the glad claymores†, lightening line on line;
From cloud to cloud as thunder speeds along,
From rank to rank—rush'd forth the choral song.—

L.

Woman and child—all caught the fire of men,
To its own heaven that Alleluia rang,
Life to the spectres had returned again;
And from the grave an armed Nation sprang!
Then spoke the Bard,—each crest its plumage bow'd,
As the large voice went lengthening thro' the crowd.

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* The Bishops, Germanus and Lupus, having baptized the Britons in the River Alyn, led them against the Picts and Saxons, to the cry of "Alleluia." The cry itself, uttered with all the enthusiasm of the Christian host, struck terror into the enemy, who at once took to flight. Most of those who escaped the sword perished in the river. This victory, achieved at Maes-Garmon, was called "Victoria Alleluiatica." BRIT. ECCLES. ANTIQ., 335; BED., lib. i., c. i., 20.

† "The claymore of the Highlanders of Scotland was no other than the cledd mawr (cle'mawr) of the Welsh." CYMRODORION, vol. ii., p. 106.

LI.

"Hark to the measured march!—The Saxons come!
The sound earth quails beneath the hollow tread
Your fathers rush'd upon the swords of Rome
And climb'd her war-ships—when the Cæsar fled!
The Saxons come! why wait within the wall?
They scale the mountain:—let its torrents fall!

LII.

"Mark, ye have swords, and shields, and armour, YE!
No mail defends the Cymrian Child of Song*,
But where the warrior—there the Bard shall be!
All fields of glory to the Bard belong!
His realm extends wherever god-like strife
Spurns the base death, and wins immortal life.

LIII.

"Unarmed he goes—his guard the shields of all,
Where he bounds foremost on the Saxon spear!
Unarmed he goes, that, falling, ev'n his fall
Shall bring no shame, and shall bequeath no fear!
Does the song cease?—avenge it by the deed,
And make the sepulchre—a nation freed!"

LIV.

He said, and where the chieftains wrangling sate,
Led the grand army marshall'd by his song;
Into the hall—and on the wild debate,
King of all kings, A PEOPLE, poured along;
And from the heart of man—the trumpet cry
Smote faction down, "Arms, arms, and liberty!"—

* No Cymrian bard, according to the primitive law, was allowed the use of weapons.

LV.

Meanwhile roll'd on the Saxon's long array;
On to the wall the surge of slaughter roll'd;
Slow up the mount—slow heaved its labouring way;
The moonlight rested on the domes of gold;
No warder peals alarum from the Keep,
And Death comes mute, as on the realm of Sleep;

LVI.

When, as their ladders touch'd the ruined wall,
And to the van, high-towering, Harold strode,
Sudden expand the brazen gates, and all
The awful arch as with the lava glow'd;
Torch upon torch the deathful sweep illumes,
The burst of armour and the flash of plumes!

LVII.

Rings Owaine's shout;—rings Geraint's thunder-cry;
The Saxon's death-knell in a hundred wars;
And Cador's laugh of triumph;—through the sky
Rush tossing banderolls—swift as shooting stars—
Trystan's white lion—Lancelot's cross of red,
And Tudor's* standard with the Saxon's head.

LVIII.

And high o'er all, its scalëd splendour rears
The vengeful emblem of the Dragon Kings.
Full on the Saxon bursts the storm of spears;
Far down the vale the charging whirlwind rings;
While thro' the ranks its barbëd knighthood clave,
All Carduel follows with its roaring wave.

* The old arms of the Tudors were three Saxons' heads.

LIX.

And ever in the van, with robes of white
And ivory harp, shone swordless Caradoc!
And ever floated in melodious might,
The clear song buoyant o'er the battle shock;
Calm as an eagle when the Olympian King
Sends the red bolt upon the tranquil wing.

LX.

Borne back, and wedg'd within the ponderous weight
Of their own jarr'd and multitudinous crowd,
Recoil'd the Saxons! As adown the height
Of some grey mountain, rolls the cloven cloud,
Smit by the shafts of the resistless day,—
Down to the vale sunk dun the rent array.

LXI.

Midway between the camp and Carduel,
Halting their slow retreat, the Saxons stood;
There, as the wall-like ocean ere it fell
On Ægypt's chariots, gathered up the flood;
There, in suspended deluge, solid rose,
And hung expectant o'er the hurrying foes!

LXII.

Right in the centre, rampired round with shields,
King Crida stood,—o'er him, its livid mane
The horse whose pasture is the Valkyr's fields
Flung wide;—but, foremost thro' the javelin-rain,
Blaz'd Harold's helm, as when, thro' all the stars
Distinct, pale soothsayers see the dooming Mars.

LXIII.

Down dazzling sweeps the Cymrian Chivalry;
Round the bright sweep closes the Saxon wall;
Snatch'd from the glimmer of the funeral sky,
Raves the blind murder; and enclasp'd with all
Its own stern hell, against the iron bar
Pants the fierce heart of the imprisoned War.

LXIV.

Only by gleaming banners and the flash
Of some large sword, the vex'd Obscure once more
Sparkled to light. In one tumultous clash
Merg'd every sound—as when the maëlstrom's roar
By dire Lofoden, dulls the seaman's groan,
And drowns the voice of tempests in its own.

LXV.

The Cymrian ranks,—disparted from their van,
And their hemm'd horsemen,—stubborn, but in vain,
Press thro' the levelled spears; yet, man by man,
And shield to shield close-serried, they sustain
The sleeting hail against them hurtling sent,
From every cloud in that dread armament.

LXVI.

But now, at length, cleaving the solid clang,
And o'er the dead men in their frowning sleep,
The rallying shouts of chiefs confronted rang,—
"Thor and Walhalla!"—answered swift and deep
By "Alleluia!" and thy chaunted cry,
Young Bard sublime, "For Christ and Liberty!"

LXVII.

Then the ranks opened, and the midnight moon
Streamed where the battle, like the scornful main,
Ebb'd from the dismal wrecks its wrath had strown.
Paused either host;—lo, in the central plain
Two chiefs had met, and in that breathless pause,
Each to its champion left a Nation's cause.

LXVIII.

Now, heaven defend thee, noble Lancelot!
For never yet such danger thee befell,
Tho' loftier deeds than thine emblazon not
The peerless Twelve of golden Carduel,
Tho' oft thy breast hath singly stemm'd a field,—
As when thy claymore clanged on Harold's shield!

LXIX.

And Lancelot knew not his majestic foe,
Save by his deeds; by Cador's cloven crest;
By Modred's corpse; by rills of blood below,
And shrinking helms above;—when from the rest,
Spurring,—the steel of his uplifted brand
Drew down the lightening of that red right hand.

LXX.

Full on the Saxon's shield the sword descends;
The strong shield clattering shivers at the stroke,
And the bright crest with all its plumage bends,
As to the blast with all its boughs an oak:
As from the blast an oak with all its boughs,
Retowering slow, the crest sublime arose.

LXXI.

Grasp'd with both hands, above the Cymrian swung
The axe that Odin taught his sons to wield,
Thrice thro' the air the circling iron sung,
Then crash'd resounding:—horse and horseman reel'd,
Tho' slant from sword and casque the weapon shore,
Down sword and casque the weight resistless bore.

LXXII.

The bright plume mingles with the charger's mane;
Light leaves the heaven, and sense forsakes the breath;
Aloft the axe impatient whirrs again,—
The steed wild-snorting bounds and foils the death;
While on its neck the reins unheeded flow,
It shames and saves its Lord, and flies the foe.

LXXIII.

"Lo, Saxons, lo, what chiefs these Walloons* lead!"
Laugh'd hollow from his helm the scornful Thane.
Then towards the Christian knights he spurr'd his steed,
When midway in his rush—rushes again
The foe that rallied while he seemed to fly,
As wheels the falcon ere it swoops from high;—

LXXIV.

And as the falcon, while its talons dart
Into the crane's broad bosom, splits its own
On the sharp beak, and, clinging heart to heart,
Both in one plumage blent, spin whirling down,—
So in that shock each found, and dealt the blow;
Horse roll'd on horse, fell grappling foe on foe.

* Walloons,—the name given by the Saxons, in contumely, to the Cymrians.

LXXV.

First to his feet the slighter Cymrian leapt,
And on the Saxon's breast set firm his knee;
Then o'er the heathen host a shudder crept,
Rose all their voices,—wild and wailingly;
"Woe, Harold, woe!" as from one bosom came,
The groan of thousands, and the mighty name.

LXXVI.

The Cymrian starts, and stays his lifted hand,
For at that name from Harold's vizor shone
Genevra's eyes! Back in its sheath the brand
He plung'd:—sprang Harold—and the foe was gone,—
Lost where the Saxons rush'd along the plain,
To save the living or avenge the slain.

LXXVII.

Spurr'd to the rescue every Cymrian knight,
Again confused, the onslaught raged on high;
Again the war-shout swell'd above the fight,
Again the chaunt "for Christ and Liberty,"
When with fresh hosts unbreath'd, the Saxon king
Forth from the wall of shields leapt thundering.

LXXVIII.

Behind the chief the dreadful gonfanon
Spread;—the Pale Horse went rushing down the wind.—
"On where the Valkyrs rest on Carduel, on!
On o'er the corpses to the wolf consign'd!
On, that the Pale Horse, ere the night be o'er
Stall'd in yon tower, may rest his hoofs of gore"!

LXXIX.

Thus spoke the king, and all his hosts replied;
Fill'd by his word and kindled by his look—
(For helmless with his grey hair streaming wide,
He strided thro' the spears)—the mountains shook—
Shook the dim city—as that answer rang!
The fierce shout chiming to the buckler's clang!

LXXX.

Aghast, the Cymrians see, like Titan sons
New-born from earth,—leap forth the sudden bands:
As when the wind's invisible tremour runs
Thro' corn-sheaves ripening for the reaper's hands,
The glittering tumult undulating flows,
And the field quivers where the panic goes.

LXXXI.

The Cymrians waver—shrink—recoil—give way,
Strike with weak hands amazed; half turn to flee;
In vain with knightly charge the chiefs delay
The hostile mass that rolls resistlessly,
And the pale hoofs for aye had trampled down
The Cymrian freedom and the Dragon Crown,

LXXXII.

But for that arch preserver,—under heaven,
Of names and states, the Bard! the hour was come
To prove the ends for which the lyre was given:—
Each thought divine demands its martyrdom.
Where round the central standard rallying flock
The Dragon Chiefs—paused and spoke Caradoc!

LXXXIII.

"Ye Cymrian men!" Hushed at the calm sweet sound,
Droop'd the wild murmur, bow'd the loftiest crest,
Meekly the haughty paladins group'd round
The swordless hero with the mailless breast,
Whose front, serene amid the spears, had taught
To humbled Force the chivalry of Thought.

LXXXIV.

"Ye Cymrian men—from Heus the Guardian's tomb
I speak the oracular promise of the Past.
Fear not the Saxon! Till the judgment doom,
Free on their hills the Dragon race shall last,
If from yon heathen, ye this night can save
One spot not wider than a single grave.

LXXXV.

"For thus the antique prophecy decrees,—
'When where the Pale Horse crushes down the dead,
War's sons shall see the lonely child of peace
Grasp at the mane to fall beneath the tread—
There, where he falleth let his dust remain,
There, bid the Dragon rest above the slain;

LXXXVI.

"'There, let the steel-clad living watch the clay,
Till on that spot their swords the grave have made,
And the Pale Horse shall melt in cloud away,
No stranger's step the sacred mound invade:
A people's life that single death shall save,
And all the land be hallowed by the grave.'

LXXXVII.

"So be the Guardian's prophecy fulfill'd,
Advance the Dragon, for the grave is mine."
He ceased; while yet the silver accents thrill'd
Each mailëd bosom down the listening line,
Bounded his steed, and like an arrow went
His plume, swift glancing thro' the armament.

LXXXVIII.

On thro' the tempest went it glimmering,
On thro' the rushing barbs and levelled spears;
On where, far streaming o'er the Teuton king,
Its horrent pomp the ghastly standard rears.
On rush'd to rescue all to whom his breath
Left what saves Nations,—the disdain of death!

LXXXIX.

Alike the loftiest knight and meanest man,
All the rous'd host, but now so panic-chill'd,
All Cymri once more as one Cymrian,
With the last light of that grand spirit fill'd,
Thro' rank on rank, mow'd down, down trampled, sped,
And reach'd the standard—to defend the dead.

XC.

Wrench'd from the heathen's hand, one moment bow'd
In the bright Christian's grasp the gonfanon;
Then from a dumb amaze the countless crowd
Swept,—and the night as with a sudden sun
Flash'd with avenging steel; life gained its goal,
And calm from lips proud-smiling went the soul!

XCI.

Leapt from his selle, the king-born Lancelot;
Leapt from the selle each paladin and knight;
In one mute sign that where upon that spot
The foot was planted, God forbade the flight:
There shall the Father-land avenge the son,
Or heap all Cymri round the grave of one.

XCII.

Then, well nigh side by side—broad floated forth
The Cymrian Dragon and the Teuton Steed,
The rival Powers that struggle for the North;
The gory Idol—the chivalric Creed;
Odin's and Christ's confronting flags unfurl'd,
As which should save and which destroy a world!

XCIII.

Then fought those Cymrian men, as if on each
All Cymri set its last undaunted hope;
Thro' the steel bulwarks round them yawns the breach;
Vistas to freedom brightning onwards ope;
Crida in vain leads band on slaughtered band,
In vain revived falls Harold's ruthless hand;

XCIV.

As on the bull the pard will fearless bound,
But if the horn that meets the spring should gore,
Aw'd with fierce pain, slinks snarling from the ground;—
So baffled in their midmost rush, before
The abrupt assault, the savage hosts give way;—
Yet will not own that man could thus dismay.

XCV.

" Some God more mighty than Walhalla's king,
Strikes in yon arms"—the sullen murmurs run,
And fast and faster drives the Dragon wing—
And shrinks and cowers the ghastly gonfanon,
They flag—they falter—lo, the Saxons fly!—
Lone rests the Dragon in the dawning sky!

XCVI.

Lone rests the Dragon with its wings outspread,
Where the pale hoofs one holy ground had trod,
There the hush'd victors round the martyr'd dead,
As round an altar, lift their hearts to God.
Calm is that brow as when a host it braved,
And smiles that lip as on the land it saved!

XCVII.

Pardon, ye shrouded and mysterious Powers,
Ye far off shadows from the spirit-clime,
If for that realm untrodden by the Hours,
Awhile we leave this lazar house of Time;
With Song remounting to those native airs
Of which, tho' exil'd, still we are the heirs.

XCVIII.

Up from the clay and towards the Seraphim,
The Immortal, men call'd Caradoc, arose.
Round the freed captive whose melodious hymn
Had hail'd each glimmer earth, the dungeon, knows,
Spread all the aisles by angel worship trod;
Blazed every altar conscious of the God.

XCIX.

All the illumed creation one calm shrine;
All space one rapt adoring extacy;
All the sweet stars with their untroubled shine,
Near and more near, enlarging thro' the sky;
All opening gradual on the eternal sight,
Joy after joy, the depths of their delight.

C.

Paused on the marge, Heaven's beautiful New-born,
Paused on the marge of that wide happiness;
And as a lark that, poised amid the morn,
Shakes from its wing the dews,—the plumes of bliss,
Sunn'd in the dawn of the diviner birth,
Shook every sorrow memory bore from earth:

CI.

Knowledge (that on the troubled waves of sense
Breaks into sparkles)—poured upon the soul
Its lambent, clear, translucent affluence,
And cold-eyed Reason loos'd its hard control;
Each godlike guess beheld the truth it sought;
And Inspiration flash'd from what was Thought.

CII.

Still'd evermore the old familiar train
That fill the frail Proscenium of our deeds,
The unquiet actors on that stage, the brain,
Which, in the spangles of their tinsell'd weeds,
Mime the true soul's majestic royalties,
And strut august in Wonder's credulous eyes;—

CIII.

Ambition's madness in the vain desires,
Which seek a goddess but to clasp a cloud;
And human Passion that with fatal fires
Consumes the shrine to which its faith is vow'd;
And even Hope, that fairest nurse of Grief,
Crown'd with young flowers,—a blight in every leaf;

CIV.

All these are still—abandoned to the worm,
Their loud breath jars not on the calm above!
Only survived, as if the single germ
Of the new life's ambrosian being,—LOVE.
Ah, if the bud can give such bloom to Time,
What is the flower when in its native clime?

CV.

Love to the radiant Stranger left alone
Of all the vanish'd hosts of memory;
While broadening round, on splendour splendour shone,
To earth soft-pitying dropt the veilless eye,
And saw the shape, that love remembered still,
Couch'd mid the ruins on the moonlit hill.

CVI.

And, with the new-born vision, piercing all
Things past and future, view'd the fates ordain'd;
The fame achieved amidst the Coral Hall;
From war and winter Freedom's symbol gained,
What rests?—the spirit from its realm of bliss,
Shot, loving down,—the guide to Happiness!

CVII.

Pale to the Cymrian king the Shadow came,
Its glory left it as the earth it neared,
In livid likeness as its corpse the same,
Wan with its wounds the awful ghost appeared.
Life heard the voice of unembodied breath,
And Sleep stood trembling side by side with Death.

CVIII.

"Come," said the Voice, "Before the Iron Gate
Which hath no egress, waiting thee, behold
Under the shadow of the brows of Fate,
The childlike playmate with the locks of gold."
Then rose the mortal following, and, before,
Moved the pale shape the angel's comrade wore.

CIX.

Where, in the centre of those ruins grey,
Immense with blind walls columnless, a tomb
For earlier kings, whose names had passed away,
Chill'd the chill moonlight with its mass of gloom,
Thro' doors ajar to every prying blast
By which to rot imperial dust had past,

CX.

The Vision went, and went the living King;
Then strange and hard to human ear to tell
By language moulded but by thoughts that bring
Material images, what there befell!
The mortal entered Eld's dumb burial place,
And at the threshold, vanished time and space.

CXI.

Yea, the hard sense of time was from the mind
Rased and annihilate;—yea, space to eye
And soul was presenceless? What rest behind?
Thought and the Infinite!—the eternal I,
And its true realm the Limitless, whose brink
Thought ever nears: What bounds us when we think?

CXII.

Yea, as the dupe in tales Arabian,
Dipp'd but his brow beneath the beaker's brim,
And in that instant all the life of man
From youth to age roll'd its slow years on him,
And while the foot stood motionless—the soul
Swept with deliberate wing from pole to pole,

CXIII.

So when the man the Grave's still portals pass'd,
Closed on the substances or cheats of earth,
The Immaterial for the things it glass'd,
Shaped a new vision from the matter's dearth:
Before the sight that saw not thro' the clay,
The undefined Immeasurable lay.

CXIV.

A realm not land, nor sea, nor earth, nor sky,
Like air impalpable, and yet not air;—
"Where am I led?" asked Life with hollow sigh.
"To Death, that dim phantasmal EVERY WHERE,"
The Ghost replied. "Nature's circumfluent robe
Girding all life—the globule or the globe."

CXV.

"Yet," said the Mortal, "if indeed this breath
Profane the world that lies beyond the tomb;
Where is the Spirit-race that peoples death?
My soul surveys but unsubstantial gloom,
A void—a blank—where none preside or dwell,
Nor woe nor bliss is here, nor heaven nor hell."

CXVI.

"And what is death?—a name for nothingness*,"
Replied the Dead; "the shadow of a shade;
Death can retain no spirit!—woe and bliss,
And heaven and hell, are for the living made;
An instant flits between life's latest sigh
And life's renewal;—that it is to die!

CXVII.

"From the brief Here to the eternal There,
We can but see the swift flash of the goal;
Less than the space between two waves of air,
The void between existence and a soul;
Wherefore look forth; and with calm sight endure
The vague, impalpable, inane Obscure:

* The sublime idea of the nonentity of death, of the instantaneous transit of the soul from one phase and cycle of being to another, is earnestly insisted upon by the early Cymrian bards in terms which seem borrowed from some spiritual belief anterior to that which does in truth teach that the life of man once begun, has not only no end, but no pause—and, in the triumphal cry of the Christian, "O grave, where is thy victory!"—annihilates death.

CXVIII.

" Lo, by the Iron Gate a giant cloud
From which emerge (the form itself unseen)
Vast adamantine brows sublimely bow'd
Over the dark,—relentlessly serene;
Thou canst not view the hand beneath the fold,
The work it weaveth none but God behold.

CXIX.

" Yet ever from this Nothingness of Death,
That hand shapes out the myriad pomps of life;
Receives the matter when resign'd the breath,
Calms into Law the Elemental strife,
On each still'd atom forms afresh bestows
(No atom lost since first Creation rose).

CXX.

" Thus seen, what men call Nature, thou surveyest,
But matter boundeth not the still one's power;
In every deed its presence thou displayest,
It prompts each impulse, guides each wingëd hour,
It spells the Valkyrs to their gory loom,
It calls the blessing from the bane they doom:

CXXI.

" It rides the steed, it saileth with the bark,
Wafts the first corn-seed to the herbless wild,
Alike directing thro' the doom of dark,
The age-long nation and the new-born child;
Here the dread Power, yet loftier tasks await,
And NATURE, twofold, takes the name of FATE.

CXXII.

"Nature or Fate, Matter's material life,
Or to all spirit the spiritual guide,
Alike with one harmonious being rife,
Form but the whole which only names divide;
Fate's crushing power, or Nature's gentle skill,
Alike one Good—from one all-loving Will."

CXXIII.

While thus the Shade benign instructs the King,
Near the dark cloud the still brows bended o'er,
They come: A soft wind with continuous wing
Sighs tho' the gloom and trembles thro' the door,
"Hark to that air," the gentle phantom said,
"In each faint murmur flit unseen the dead,—

CXXIV.

"Pass thro' the gate, from life the life resume,
As the old impulse flies to heaven or hell."
While spoke the Ghost, stood forth amidst the gloom,
A lucent Image, crowned with asphodell,
The left hand bore a mirror chrystal-bright,
A wand star-pointed glittered in the right,

CXXV.

"Dost thou not know me?—me, thy second soul?"
Said the bright Image, with its low sweet voice,
"I who have led thee to each noble goal,
Mirror'd thy heart, and starward led thy choice?
To teach thee wisdom won in Labour's school,
I lured thy footsteps to the forest pool,

CXXVI.

"Shewed all the woes which wait inebriate power,
And woke the man from youth's voluptuous dream;
Glass'd on the chrystal—let each stainless hour
Obey the wand I lift unto the beam;
And at the last, when yonder gates expand,
Pass with thine angel, Conscience, hand in hand."

CXXVII.

Spoke the sweet Splendour, and as music dies
Into the heart that hears, subsides away,
Then Arthur lifted his serenest eyes
Towards the pale Shade from the celestial day,
And said, "O thou in life beloved so well,
Dream I or wake?—As those last accents fell,

CXXVIII.

"So fears that, spite of thy mild words, dismay'd,
Fears not of death, but that which death conceals,
Vanish;—my soul that trembled at thy shade,
Yearns to the far light which the shade reveals,
And sees how human is the dismal error
That hideth God, when veiling death with terror.

CXXIX.

"Ev'n thus some infant, in the early spring,
Under the pale buds of the almond tree,
Shrinks from the wind that with an icy wing
Shakes showering down white flakes that seem to be
Winter's wan sleet,—till the quick sunbeam shows
That those were blossoms which he took for snows.

CXXX.

"Thou to this last and sovran mystery
Of my mysterious travail guiding sent,
Dear as thou wert, I will not mourn for thee,
Thou wert not shaped for earth's hard element—
Our ends, our aims, our pleasure, and our woe,
Thou knew'st them all, but thine we could not know.

CXXXI.

"Forgive that none were worthy of thy worth!
That none took heed, upon the plodding way,
What diamond dew was on the flowers of earth,
Till in thy soul drawn upward to the day.
But now, why gape the wounds upon thy breast?
What guilty hand dismissed thee to the blest?

CXXXII.

"For blest thou art, belov'd and lost? Oh, speak,
Say thou art with the Angels?"—As at night
Far off the pharos on the mountain peak
Sends o'er dim ocean one pale path of light,
Lost in the wideness of the weltering Sea,
So, that one gleam along eternity

CXXXIII.

Vouchsafed, the radiant guide (its mission closed)
Fled, and the mortal stood amidst the cloud!
All dark above,—lo at his feet reposed
Beneath the Brow's still terror o'er it bow'd,
With eyes that lit the gloom thro' which they smil'd,
A Virgin shape, half woman and half child!

CXXXIV.

There, bright before the iron gates of Death,
Bright in the shadow of the awful Power
Which did as Nature give the human breath,
As Fate mature the germ and nurse the flower
Of earth for heaven,—Toil's last and sweetest prize,
The destined Soother lifts her fearless eyes!

CXXXV.

Thro' all the mortal's frame, enraptured thrills
A subtler tide, a life ambrosial,
Bright as the fabled element which fills
The veins of Gods to whom in Ida's hall
Flush'd Hebe brims the urn. The transport broke
The charm that gave it—and the Dreamer woke.

CXXXVI.

Was it in truth a Dream? He gazed around,
And saw the granite of sepulchral walls;
Thro' open doors, along the desolate ground,
O'er coffin dust—the morning sunbeam falls;
On mouldering relics life its splendour flings,
The arms of warriors and the bones of kings.—

CXXXVII.

He stood within that Golgotha of old,
Whither the Phantom first had led the soul.
It was no dream! lo, round those locks of gold
Rest the young sunbeams like an auriole;
Lo, where the day, night's mystic promise keeps,
And in the tomb a life of beauty sleeps!

CXXXVIII.

Slow to his eyes, those lids reveal their own,
And, the lips smiling even in their sigh,
The Virgin woke! Oh, never yet was known,
In bower or plaisaunce under summer sky,
Life so enrich'd with nature's happiest bloom
As thine, thou young Aurora of the tomb!

CXXXIX.

Words cannot paint thee, gentlest cynosure
Of all things lovely in that loveliest form,
Souls wear—the youth of woman! brows as pure
As Memphian skies that never knew a storm;
Lips with such sweetness in their honied deeps
As fills the rose in which a fairy sleeps;

CXL.

Eyes on whose tenderest azure, aching hearts
Might look as to a heaven, and cease to grieve;
The very blush,—as day, when it departs,
Haloes, in flushing, the mild cheek of eve,—
Taking soft warmth in light from earth afar,
Heralds no thought less holy than a star.

CXLI.

And Arthur spoke! O ye, all noble souls,
Divine how knighthood speaks to maiden fear!
Yet, is it fear which that young heart controuls
And leaves its music voiceless on the ear?—
Ye, who have felt what words can ne'er express,
Say then, is fear as still as happiness?

CXLII.

By the mute pathos of an eloquent sign,
Her rosy finger on her lip, the maid
Seem'd to denote that on that coral shrine
Speech was to silence vow'd. Then from the shade
Gliding—she stood beneath the golden skies,
Fair as the dawn that brightened Paradise.

CXLIII.

And Arthur looked, and saw the dove no more;
Yet, by some wild and wondrous glamoury,
Chang'd to the shape the new companion wore,
His soul the missing Angel seemed to see;
And, soft and silent as the earlier guide,
The soft eyes thrill, the silent footsteps glide.

CXLIV.

Thro' paths his yester steps had fail'd to find,
Adown the woodland slope she leads the king,—
And, pausing oft, she turns to look behind,
As oft had turned the Dove upon the wing;
And oft he questioned, still to find reply
Mute on the lip, yet struggling to the eye.

CXLV.

Far briefer now the way, and open more
To heaven, than those his whileome steps had won;
And sudden, lo! his galley's brazen prore
Beams from the greenwood burnished in the sun;
Up from the sward his watchful cruisers spring,
And loud-lipp'd welcome girds with joy the King.

CXLVI.

Now plies the rapid oar, now swells the sail;
All day, and deep into the heart of night,
Flies the glad bark before the favouring gale;
Now Sabra's virgin waters dance in light
Under the large full moon, on margents green,
Lone with charr'd wrecks where Saxon fires have been.

CXLVII.

Here furls the sail, here rests awhile the oar,
And from the crews the Cymrians and the maid
Pass with mute breath upon the mournful shore;
For, where yon groves the gradual hillock shade,
A convent stood when Arthur left the land.
God grant the shrine hath 'scaped the heathen's hand!

CXLVIII.

Landing, on lifeless hearths, thro' roofless walls
And casement gaps, the ghost-like star-beams peer;
Welcomed by night and ruin, hollow falls
The footstep of a King!—Upon the ear
The inexpressible hush of murder lay,—
Wide yawn'd the doors, and not a watch dog's bay!

CXLIX.

They pass the groves, they gain the holt, and lo!
Rests of the sacred pile but one grey tower,
A fort for luxury in the long-ago
Of gentile gods, and Rome's voluptuous power.
But far on walls yet spared, the moon-beams fell,—
Far on the golden domes of Carduel!

CL.

" Joy," cried the King, " behold, the land lives still!"
Then Gawaine pointed, where in lengthening line
The Saxon watch-fires from the haunted hill
(Shorn of its forest old,) their blood-red shine
Fling over Isca, and with wrathful flush
Gild the vast storm-cloud of the armëd hush.

CLI.

" Ay," said the King, " in that lull'd Massacre
Doth no ghost whisper Crida—' Sleep no more!'
" Hark, where I stand, dark murder-chief, on thee
I launch the doom! ye airs, that wander o'er
Ruins and graveless bones, to Crida's sleep
Bear Cymri's promise, which her king shall keep!"

CLII.

As thus he spoke, upon his outstretch'd arm
A light touch trembled,—turning he beheld
The maiden of the tomb; a wild alarm
Shone from her eyes; his own their terror spell'd.
Struggling for speech, the pale lips writhed apart,
And, as she clung, he heard her beating heart;

CLIII.

While Arthur marvelling sooth'd the agony
Which, comprehending not, he still could share,
Sudden sprang Gawaine—hark! a timorous cry
Pierced yon dim shadows! Arthur look'd, and where
On artful valves revolved the stoney door,
A kneeling nun his knight is bending o'er.

CLIV.

Ere the nun's fears the knightly words dispell,
As towards the spot the maid and monarch came,
On Arthur's brow the slanted moon-beams fell,
And the nun knew the King, and call'd his name,
And clasp'd his knees, and sobb'd thro' joyous tears,
"Once more! once more! our God his people hears!"

CLV.

Kin to his blood—the welcome face of one
Known as a saint throughout the Christian land,
Arthur recall'd, and as a pious son
Honouring a mother—on that sacred hand
Bent low, in murmuring—"Say, what mercy saves
Thee, blest survivor in this shrine of graves?"

CLVI.

Then the nun led them, thro' the artful door
Mask'd in the masonry, adown a stair
That coil'd its windings to the grottoed floor
Of vaulted chambers desolately fair;
Wrought in the green hill, like an Oread's home,
For summer heats by some soft lord of Rome,

CLVII.

On shells, which nymphs from silver sands might cull,
On paved mosaics, and long-silenced fount,
On marble waifs of the far Beautiful
By graceful spoiler garner'd from the mount
Of vocal Delphi, or the Elean town,
Or Sparta's rival of the violet-crown—

CLVIII.

Shone the rude cresset from the homely shrine
Of that new Power, upon whose Syrian Cross
Perished the antique Jove! And the grave sign
Of the glad faith (which, for the lovely loss
Of poet-gods, their own Olympus frees
To men!—our souls the new Uranides,)

CLIX.

High from the base, on which, of old, reposed
Grape-crown'd Iacchus—spoke the Saving Woe!
The place itself the sister's tale disclosed.
Here, while, amidst the hamlet doom'd below,
Raged the fierce Saxon—was retreat secured;
Nor gnawed the flame where those deep vaults immured.

CLX.

To peasants, scattered thro' the neighbouring plains,
The secret known;—kind hands with pious care
Supply such humble nurture as sustains
Lives most with fast familiar; thus and there
The patient sisters in their faith sublime,
Felt God was good, and waited for His time.

CLXI.

Yet ever when the crimes of earth and day
Slept in the starry peace, to the lone tower
The sainted abbess won her nightly way,
And gazed on Carduel!—'Twas the wonted hour
When from the opening door the Cymrian knight
Saw the pale shadow steal along the light.

CLXII.

Musing, the King the safe retreat surveyed,
And smooth'd his brow from time's most anxious care;
Here—from the strife secure, might rest the maid
Not meet the tasks that morn must bring to share;
She, while he mused, the nun's mild aspect eyed,
And crept with woman's trust to woman's side.

CLXIII.

"King," said the gentle saint, "from what far clime
Comes this fair stranger, that her eyes alone
Answer our mountain tongue?"—"May happier time,"
Replied the King, "her tale, her land, make known!
Meanwhile, O kind recluse, receive the guest
To whom these altars seem the native rest."

CLXIV.

The sister smiled, "In sooth those looks," she said,
"Do speak a soul pure with celestial air;
And in the morrow's awful hour of dread,
Her heart methinks will echo to our prayer,
And breathe responsive to the hymns that swell
The Christian's curse upon the infidel.

CLXV.

"But say, if truth from rumour vague and wild
To this still world the friendly peasants bring,
'That grief and wrath for some lost heathen child,
Urge to yon walls the Mercian's direful king?'"—
"Nay," said the Cymrian, "doth ambition fail
When force needs falsehood, of the glozing tale?

CLXVI.

"And—but behold she droops, she faints, outworn
By the long wandering and the scorch of day!"
Pale as a lily when the dewless morn,
Parch'd in the fiery dog-star, wanes away
Into the glare of noon without a cloud,
O'er the nun's breast that flower of beauty bow'd.

CLXVII.

Yet still the clasp retained the hand that prest,
And breath came still, tho' heav'd in sobbing sighs.
"Leave her," the sister said, "to needful rest,
And to such care as woman best supplies;
And may this charge a conqueror soon recall,
And change the refuge to a monarch's hall!"

CLXVIII.

Tho' found the asylum sought, with boding mind
The crowning guerdon of his mystic toil
To the kind nun the unwilling King resigned;
Nor till his step was on his mountain soil
Did his large heart its lion calm regain,
And o'er his soul no thought but Cymri reign.

CLXIX.

As towards the bark the friends resume their way,
Quick they resolve the conflict's hardy scheme;
With half the Northmen, at the break of day
Shall Gawaine sail where Sabra's broadening stream
Admits a reeded creek, and, landing there,
Elude the fleet the neighbouring waters bear;

CLXX.

Thro' secret paths with bush and bosk o'ergrown,
Wind round the tented hill, and win the wall;
With Arthur's name arouse the leaguered town,
Give the pent stream the cataract's rushing fall,
Sweep to the camp, and on the Pagan horde
Urge all of man that yet survives the sword.

CLXXI.

Meanwhile on foot the king shall guide his band
Round to the rearward of the vast array,
Where yet large fragments of the forest stand
To shroud with darkness the avenger's way;—
Thence, when least look'd for, burst upon the foe,
On war's own heart direct the sudden blow;

CLXXII.

Thus, front and rear assailed, their numbers, less
(Perplex'd, distraught,) avail the heathen's power.
Dire was the peril, and the sole success
In the nice seizure of the season'd hour;
The high-soul'd rashness of the bold emprize;
The fear that smites the fiercest in surprize;

CLXXIII.

Whatever worth the enchanted boons may bear,
The hero heart by which those boons were won;
The stubborn strength of that supreme despair,
When victory lost is all a land undone;
In the Man's cause, and in the Christian's zeal,
And the just God that sanctions Freedom's steel.

CLXXIV.

Meanwhile, along a cavelike corridor
The stranger guest the gentle abbess led;
Where the voluptuous hypocaust of yore
Left cells for vestal dreams saint-hallowëd.
Her own, austerely rude, affords the rest
To which her parting kiss consigns the guest.

CLXXV.

But welcome not for rest that loneliness!
The iron lamp the imaged cross displays;
And to that guide for souls, what mute distress
Lifts the imploring passion of its gaze?
Fear like remorse—and sorrow dark as sin?
Enter that mystic heart and look within!

CLXXVI.

What broken gleams of memory come and go
Along the dark!—a silent starry love
Lighting young Fancy's virgin waves below,
But shed from thoughts that rest ensphered above!
Oh, flowers whose bloom had perfumed Carmel, weave
Wreaths for such love as lived in Genevieve!

CLXXVII.

A May noon resteth on the forest hill;
A May noon resteth over ruins hoar;
A maiden muses on the forest hill,
A tomb's vast pile o'er shades the ruins hoar,
With doors now open to each prying blast,
Where once to rot imperial dust had past;

CLXXVIII.

Thro' those dark portals glides the musing maid,
And slumber drags her down its airy deep.
O wondrous trance! in druid robes array'd,
What form benignant charms the life-like sleep?
What spells low-chaunted, holy-sweet, like prayer,
Plume the light soul, and waft it through the air?

CLXXIX.

Comes a dim sense as of an angel's being,
Bath'd in ambrosial dews and liquid day;
Of floating wings, like heavenward instincts, freeing
Thro' azure solitudes a spirit's way,—
An absence of all earthly thought, desire,
Aim—hope,—save those which love and which aspire;

CLXXX.

Each harder sense of the mere human mind
Merged into some protective prescience;
Calm gladness, conscious of a charge consign'd
To the pure ward of guardian innocence;
And the felt presence, in that charge, of one
Whose smile to life is as to flowers the sun.

CLXXXI.

Go on, thou troubled Memory, wander on!
Dull, o'er the bounds of the departing trance,
Droops the lithe wing the airier life hath known;
Yet on the confines of the dream, the glance
Sees—where before he stood,—the Enchanter stand,
Bend the vast brow, and stretch the shadowy hand.

CLXXXII.

And, human sense reviving, on the ear
Fall words ambiguous, now with happy hours
And plighted love,—and now with threats austere
Of demon dangers—of malignant Powers
Whose force might yet the counter charm unbind,
If loosed the silence to her lips enjoin'd.—

CLXXXIII.

Then, as that Image faded from the verge
Of life's renewed horizon—came the day;
Yet, ere the last gleams of the vision merge
Into earth's common light, their parting ray
On Arthur's brow the faithful memories leave,
And the Dove's heart still beats in Genevieve!

CLXXXIV.

Still she the presence feels,—resumes the guide,
Till slowly, slowly waned the prescient power
That gave the guardian to the pilgrim's side;—
And only rested, with her human dower
Of gifts sublime to soothe, but weak to save,
And blind to warn,—the Daughter of the Grave.

CLXXXV.

Yet the lost dream bequeathed for ever more
Thoughts that did, like a second nature, make
Life to that life the Dove had hover'd o'er
Cling as an instinct,—and, for that dear sake,
Danger and Death had found the woman's love
In realms as near the Angels as the Dove.

CLXXXVI.

And now and now is she herself the one
To launch the bolt on that beloved life?
Shuddering she starts, again she hears the nun
Denounce the curse that arms the awful strife;
Again her lips the wild cry stifle,—"See
Crida's lost child, thy country's curse, in me!"

CLXXXVII.

Or—if along the world of that despair
Fleet other spectres,—from the ruined steep
Points the dread arm, and hisses thro' the air
The avenger's sentence on the father's sleep!
The dead seem rising from the yawning floor,
And the shrine steams as with a shamble's gore.

CLXXXVIII.

Sudden she springs, and, from her veiling hands,
Lifts the pale courage of her calmëd brow;
With upward eyes, and murmuring lips, she stands,
Raising to heaven the new-born hope:—and now
Glides from the cell along the galleried caves,
Mute as a moonbeam flitting over waves.

CLXXXIX.

Now gained the central grot; now won the stair;
The lamp she bore gleamed on the door of stone;
Why halt? what hand detains?—she turn'd, and there,
On the nun's serge and brow rebuking, shone
The tremulous light; then fear her lips unchain'd
From that stern silence by the Dream ordain'd,

CXC.

And at those holy feet the Saxon fell
Sobbing, "Oh, stay me not! Oh, rather free
These steps that fly to save *his* Carduel!
Throne, altars, life—his life! In me, in me,
To these strange shrines, thy saints in mercy bring
Crida's lost Child!—Way, way to save thy king!"

CXCI.

The sister listened; gladness, awe, amaze,
Fused in that lambent atmosphere of soul,
FAITH in the wise All-Good!—so melt the rays
Of varying Iris in the lucid whole
Of light;—"Thy people still to Thee are dear,
O Lord," she murmured, "and Thy hand is here!"

CXCII.

"Yes," cried the suppliant, "if my loss deplored,
My fate unguest—misled and arm'd my sire;
When to his heart his child shall be restored,
Sure, war itself will in the cause expire!
Ruth come with joy,—and in that happy hour
Hate drop the steel, and Love alone have power?"

CXCIII.

Then the nun took the Saxon to her breast,
Round the bow'd neck she hung her sainted cross,
And said, "Go forth—O beautiful and blest!
And if my king rebuke me for thy loss,
Be my reply the gain that loss bestow'd,—
Hearths for his people, altars for his God!"

CXCIV.

She ceased;—on secret valves revolved the door;
On the calm hill-top breathed the dawning air;
One moment paused the steps of Hope, and o'er
The war's vast slumber looked the Soul of Prayer.
So halts the bird that from the cage hath flown;—
A light bough rustled, and the Dove was gone.

KING ARTHUR.

BOOK XII.

ARGUMENT.

Preliminary Stanzas—Scene returns to Carduel—a day has passed since the retreat of the Saxons into their encampment—The Cymrians take advantage of the enemy's inactivity, to introduce supplies into the famished city—Watch all that day, and far into the following night, is kept round the corpse of Caradoc—Before dawn, the burial takes place—The Prophet by the grave of the Bard—Merlin's address to the Cymrians, whom he dismisses to the walls, in announcing the renewed assault of the Saxons—Merlin then demands a sacrifice from Lancelot—gives commissions to the two sons of Faul the Aleman, and takes Faul himself (to whom an especial charge is destined) to the city—The scene changes to the Temple Fortress of the Saxons—The superstitious panic of the heathen hosts at their late defeat—The magic divinations of the Runic priests—The magnetic trance of the chosen Soothsayer—The Oracle he utters—He demands the blood of a Christian maid—The pause of the priests and the pagan king—The abrupt entrance of Genevieve—Crida's joy—The priests demand the Victim—Genevieve's Christian faith is evinced by the Cross which the Nun had hung round her neck—Crida's reply to the priests—They dismiss one of their number to inflame the army, and so insure the sacrifice—The priests lead the Victim to the Altar, and begin their hymn, as the Soothsayer wakes from his trance—The interruption and the compact—Crida goes from the Temple to the summit of the tower without—The invading march of the Saxon troops under Harold described—The light from the Dragon Keep—The Saxons scale the walls, and disappear within the town—The irruption of flames from the fleet—The dismay of that part of the army that had remained in the camp—The flames are seen by the rest of the heathen army in the streets of Carduel—The approach of the Northmen under Gawaine—The light on the Dragon Keep changes its hue into blood-red, and the Prophet appears on the height of the tower—The retreat of the Saxons from the city—The joy of the Chief Priest—The time demanded by the compact has expired—He summons Crida to complete the sacrifice—Crida's answer—The Priest rushes back into the Temple—The offering is bound to the Altar—Faul! the gleam of the enchanted glaive—The appearance of Arthur—The War takes its last stand within the heathen temple—Crida and the Teuton kings—Arthur meets Crida hand to hand—Meanwhile Harold saves the Gonfanon, and follows the bands under his lead to the river side—He addresses them, re-forms their ranks, and leads them to the brow of the hill—His embassy to Arthur—The various groups in the heathen temple described—Harold's speech—Arthur's reply—Merlin's prophetic address to the chiefs of the two races—The End.

BOOK XII.

I.

FLOW on, flow on, fair Fable's happy stream,
Vocal for aye with Eld's first music-chaunt,
Where, mirror'd far adown the chrystal, gleam
The golden domes of Carduel and Romaunt;
Still one last look on knighthood's peerless ring,
On moonëd Dream-land and the Dragon King!—

II.

Detain me yet amid the lovely throng,
Hold yet thy *Sabbat*, thou melodious spell!
Still to the circle of enchanted song
Charm the high Mage of Druid parable,
The Fairy, bard-led from her Caspian Sea,
And Genius, lured from caves in Araby!

III.

Tho' me, less fair if less familiar ways,
Sought in the paths by earlier steps untrod,
Allure—yet ever, in the marvel-maze,
The flowers afar perfume the virgin sod;
The simplest leaf in fairy gardens cull,
And round thee opens all the Beautiful!

IV.

Alas! the sunsets of our Northern main
Soon lose the tints Hesperian Fancy weaves;
Soon the sweet river feels the icy chain,
And haunted forests shed their murmurous leaves;
The bough must wither, and the bird depart,
And winter clasp the world—as life the heart!

V.

A day had pass'd since first the Saxons fled
Before the Christian, and their war lay still;
From morn to eve the Cymrian riders spread
Where flocks yet graze on some remoter hill,
Pale, on the walls, fast-sinking Famine waits,
When hark, the droves come lowing thro' the gates!

VI.

Yet still, the corpse of Caradoc around,
All day, and far into the watch of night,
The grateful victors guard the sacred ground;
But in that hour when all his race of light
Leave Eos lone in heaven,—earth's hollow breast
Oped to the dawn-star and the singer's rest.

VII.

Now, ere they lowered the corpse, with noiseless tread
Still as a sudden shadow, Merlin came
Thro' the arm'd crowd; and paus'd before the dead,
And, looking on the face, thrice call'd the name.
Then, hush'd thro' all an awed compassion ran,
And all gave way to the old quiet man.

VIII.

For Cymri knew that of her children none
Had, like the singer, loved the lonely sage;
All felt, that there a father call'd a son
Out from that dreariest void,—bereavëd age;
Forgot the dread renown, the mystic art,
And saw but sacred there—the human heart!

IX.

And thrice the old man kiss'd the lips that smil'd,
And thrice he call'd the name,—then to the grave,
Hush'd as the nurse that bears a sleeping child
To its still mother's breast,—the form he gave:
With tender hand composed the solemn rest,
And laid the harp upon the silent breast.

X.

And then he sate him down, a little space
From the dark couch, and so, of none took heed;
But lifting to the twilight skies his face,
That secret soul which never man could read,
Far as the soul it miss'd, from human breath,
Rose—where Thought rises when it follows Death!

XI.

And swells and falls in gusts the funeral dirge
As hollow falls the mould, or swells the mound;
And (Cymri's warlike wont) upon the verge,
The orbëd shields are placed in rows around;
Now o'er the dead, grass waves;—the rite is done;
And a new grave shall greet a rising sun.

XII.

Then slowly turned, and calmly moved the sage,
On the Bard's grave his stand the Prophet took.
High o'er the crowd in all his pomp of age
August, a glory brightened from his look;
Hope flashed in eyes illumined from his own,
Bright, as if there some sure redemption shone.

XIII.

Thus spoke the Seer: "Hosannah to the brave;
Lo, the eternal heir-looms of your land!
A realm's great treasure house! The freeman's grave,
The hero creed that to the swordless hand
Thought, when heroic, gives an army's might;—
And song to nations as to plants the light!

XIV.

"Cymrians, the sun yon towers will scarcely gild,
Ere war will scale them! Here, your task is o'er.
Your walls your camp, your streets your battle field;
Each house a fortress!—One strong effort more
For God, for Freedom—for your shrines and homes!
After the Martyr the Deliverer comes!"

XV.

He ceased; and such the reverence of the crowd,
No lip presumed to question. Wonder hushed
Its curious guess, and only Hope aloud
Spoke in the dauntless shout: each cheek was flushed;
Each eye was bright;—each heart beat high; and all
Ranged in due ranks, resought the shatter'd wall:

XVI.

Save only four, whom to that holy spot
The Prophet's whisper stay'd:—of these, the one
Of knightly port and arms, was Lancelot;
But in the ruder three, with garments won
From the wild beast,—long hair'd, large limb'd, again
See Rhine's strong sons, the convert Alemen!

XVII.

When these alone remained beside the mound,
The Prophet drew apart the Paladin,
And said, "What time, feud, worse than famine, found
The Cymrian race, like some lost child of sin
That courts, yet cowers from death;—serene thro' all
The jarring factions of the maddening hall,

XVIII.

"Thou didst in vain breathe high rebuke to pride,
With words sublimely proud. 'No post the man
Ennobles;—man the post! did He who died
To crown in death the end His birth began,
Assume the sceptre when the cross He braved?
Did He wear purple in the world He saved?

XIX.

"'Ye clamour which is worthiest of command,—
Place me, whose fathers led the hosts of Gaul,
Amongst the meanest children of your land;
Let me owe nothing to my fathers,—all
To such high deeds as raised, ere kings were known,
The boldest savage to the earliest throne!'

XX.

" But none did heed thee, and in scornful grief
Went thy still footsteps from the raging hall,
Where, by the altar of the bright Belief
That spans this cloud-world when its sun-showers fall,
Assured at least thy bride in heaven to be,
Genevra prayed—not life but death with thee.

XXI.

" There, by the altar, did ye join your hands,
And in your vow, scorning malignant Time,
Ye plighted two immortals! in those bands
Hope still wove flowers,—but earth was not their clime;
Then to the breach alone, resigned, consol'd,
Went Gaul's young hero.—Art thou now less bold?

XXII.

" Thy smile replies! Know, while we speak, the King
Is on the march; each moment that delays
The foeman, speeds the conqueror on its wing;
If, till the hour is ripe, the Saxon stays
His rush, then idly wastes it on our wall,
Not ours the homes that burn, the shrines that fall!

XXIII.

" But that delay vouchsafed not—comes in vain
The bright achiever of enchanted powers;
He comes a king,—no people but the slain,
And round his throne will crash his blazing towers.
This is not all; for him, the morn is rife
With one dire curse that threatens more than life;—

XXIV.

"A curse, launched, which withers every leaf
In victory's crown, chills youth itself to age!
Here magic fails—for over love and grief
There is no glamour in the brazen page.
Born of the mind, o'er mind extends mine art;—
Beyond its circle beats the human heart!—

XXV.

"Delay the hour—save Carduel for thy king;
Avert the curse; from misery save thy brother!"
"Thrice welcome Death," cried Lancelot, "could it bring
The bliss to bless mine Arthur! As the mother
Lives in her child, the planet in the sky,
Thought in the soul, in Arthur so live I."

XXVI.

"Prepare," the Seer replied, "be firm!—and yield
The maid thou lovest to her Saxon sire."
Like a man lightning-stricken, Lancelot reel'd,
And as if blinded by the intolerant fire,
Covered his face with his convulsive hand,
And groaned aloud, "What woe dost thou demand?

XXVII.

"Yield her! and wherefore? Cruel as thou art!
Can Cymri's king or Carduel's destiny
Need the lone offering of a loving heart,
Nothing to kings and states, but all to me?"
"Son," said the Prophet, "can the human eye
Trace by what wave light quivers from the sky;

XXVIII.

"Explore some thought whose utterance shakes the earth
Along the airy galleries of the brain;
Or can the human judgment gauge the worth
Of the least link in Fate's harmonious chain?
All doubt is cowardice—all trust is brave—
Doubt, and desert thy king;—believe and save."

XXIX.

Then Lancelot fix'd his keen eyes on the sage,
And said, "Am I the sacrifice, or she?
Risks she no danger from the heathen's rage,
She, the new Christian?"—"Danger more with thee!
Can blazing roofs and trampled altars yield
A shelter surer than her father's shield?

XXX.

"If mortal schemes may foil the threatening hour,
Thy heart's reward shall crown thine honour's test;
And the same fates that crush the heathen power
Restore the Christian to the conqueror's breast;
Yea, the same lights that gild the nuptial shrine
Of Arthur, shed a beam as blest on thine!"

XXXI.

"I trust and I submit," said Lancelot,
With pale firm lip. "Go thou—I dare not—I!
Say, if I yield, that I abandon not!
Her form may leave a desert to my eye,
But here—but *here!*"—No more his lips could say,
He smote his bleeding heart, and went his way!

XXXII.

The Enchanter, thoughtful, turned, and on the grave
His look relaxing fell.—"Ah, child, lost child!
To thy young life no youth harmonious gave
Music;—no love thine exquisite griefs beguil'd;
Thy soul's deep ocean hid its priceless pearl;—
And *he* is loved, and yet repines! O churl!"

XXXIII.

And murmuring thus, he saw below the mound
The stoic brows of the stern Alemen,
Their gaunt limbs strewn supine along the ground,
Still as gorg'd lions couch'd before the den
After the feast; their life no medium knows,
Here, headlong conflict, there, inert repose!

XXXIV.

"Which of these feet could overtake the roe?
Which of these arms could grapple with the bear?"
"My first-born," answered Faul, "outstrips the roe;
My youngest crushes in his grasp the bear."
"Thou, then, the swift one, gird thy loins, and rise;
See o'er the lowland where the vapour lies,

XXXV.

"Far to the right, a mist from Sabra's wave;
Amidst that haze explore a creek rush-grown,
Screen'd from the waters less remote, which lave
The Saxon's anchor'd barks, and near a lone
Grey crag where bitterns boom; within that creek
Gleams thro' green boughs a galley's brazen peak;

XXXVI.

"This gain'd, demand the chief, a Christian knight,
The bear's rough mantle o'er his rusted mail;
Tell him from me, to tarry till a light
Burst from the Dragon keep;—then crowd his sail,
Fire his own ship—and, blazing to the bay,
Cleave thro' yon fleet his red destroying way;

XXXVII.

"No arduous feat: the gallies are unmann'd,
Moor'd each to each; let fire consume them all!
Then, the shore won, lead hitherwards the band
Between the Saxon camp and Cymrian wall.
What next behoves, the time itself will show,
Here counsel ceases;—there, ye find the foe!"

XXXVIII.

Heard the wild youth, and no reply made he,
But braced his belt and grip'd his spear, and straight
As the bird flies, he flew. "My son, to thee,"
Next said the Prophet, "a more urgent fate
And a more perilous duty are consign'd;
Mark, the strong arm requires the watchful mind.

XXXIX.

"Thou hast to pass the Saxon sentinels;
Thou hast to thread the Saxon hosts alone;
Many are there whom thy far Rhine expels
His swarming war-hive,—and their tongue thine own;
Take from yon Teuton dead the mail'd disguise,
Thy speech their ears, thy garb shall dupe their eyes;

XL.

"The watch-pass 'Vingólf*' wins thee thro' the van,
The rest shall danger to thy sense inspire,
And that quick light in the hard sloth of man
Coil'd, till sharp need strike forth the sudden fire.
The encampment traversed, where the woods behind
Slope their green gloom, thy stealthy pathway wind;

XLI.

"Keep to one leftward track, amidst the chase
Clear'd for the hunter's sport in happier days;
Till scarce a mile from the last tent, a space
Clasping grey crommell stones, will close the maze.
There, in the centre of that Druid ring,
Arm'd men will stand around the Cymrian King:—

XLII.

"Tell him to set upon the tallest pine
Keen watch, and wait, until from Carduel's tower,
High o'er the wood, a starry light shall shine;
Not *that* the signal, tho' it nears the hour,
But when the light shall change its hues, and form
One orb blood-dyed, as sunsets red with storm;

XLIII.

"Then, while the foe their camp unguarded leave,
And round our walls their tides tempestuous roll,
To yon wood pile, the Saxon fortress, cleave;
Be Odin's Idol the Deliverer's goal.
Say to the King, 'In that funereal fane
Complete thy mission, and thy guide regain!'"

* VINGÓLF. Literally, "The Abode of Friends;" the name for the place in which the heavenly goddesses assemble.

XLIV.

While spoke the seer, the Teuton's garb of mail
The son of Faul had donn'd, and bending now,
He kiss'd his father's cheek.—"And if I fail,"
He murmured, "leave thy blessing on my brow,
My father!" Then the convert of the wild
Look'd up to Heaven, and mutely bless'd his child.

XLV.

"Thou wend with me, proud sire of dauntless men,"
Resumed the seer:—"On thine arm let my age
Lean, as shall thine upon *their* children!"—Then
The loreless savage—the all-gifted sage,
By the strong bonds of will and heart allied;
Went towards the towers of Carduel, side by side.

XLVI.

To Crida's camp the swift song rushing flies;
Round Odin's shrine wild Priests, rune-muttering,
Task the weird omens hateful to the skies;
Pale by the idol stands the grey-hair'd king;
And, from without, the unquiet armament
Booms, in hoarse surge, its chafing discontent.

XLVII.

For in defeat (when first that multitude
Shrunk from a foe, and fled the Cymrian sword,)
The pride of man the wrath of gods had viewed;
Religious horror smote the palsied horde;
The field refused, till priest, and seid, and charm,
Explore the offence, and wrath divine disarm.

XLVIII.

All day, all night, glared fires, dark-red and dull
With mystic gums, before the Teuton god,
And waved o'er runes which Mimer's trunkless skull
Had whisper'd Odin—the Diviner's rod;
And rank with herbs which baleful odours breathed,
The bubbling hell juice in the caldron seethed.

XLIX.

Now towards that hour when into coverts dank
Slinks back the wolf; when to her callow brood
Veers, thro' still boughs, the owl; when from the bank
The glow-worm wanes; when heaviest droops the wood,
Ere the faint twitter of the earliest lark,—
Ere dawn creeps chill and timorous thro' the dark;

L.

About that hour, of all the dreariest,
A flame leaps up from the dull fire's repose,
And shoots weird sparks along the runes, imprest
On stone and elm-bark, ranged in ninefold rows;
The vine's deep flush the purpling seid assumes,
And the strong venom coils in maddening fumes.

LI.

Pale grew the elect Diviner's altered brows;
Swell'd the large veins, and writhed the foaming lips;
And as some swart and fateful planet glows
Athwart the disk to which it brings eclipse;
So that strange Pythian madness whose control
Seems half to light and half efface the soul,

LII.

Broke from the horror of his glaring look;
His breath that died in hollow gusts away;
Seized by the grasp of unseen tempests, shook
To its rack'd base the spirit-house of clay;
Till the dark Power made firm the crushing spell;
And from the man burst forth the voice of hell.

LIII.

"The god—the god! lo, on his throne he reels!
Under his knit brows glow his wrathful eyes!
At his dread feet a spectral Valkyr kneels,
And shrouds her face! And cloud is in the skies,
And neither sun nor star, nor day nor night,
But in the cloud a steadfast Cross of Light!

LIV.

"The god—the god! hide, hide me from his gaze!
Its awful anger burns into the brain!
Spare me, O spare me! Speak, thy child obeys!
What rites appease thee, Father of the Slain *?
What direful omen do these signs foreshow?
What victim ask'st thou? Speak; the blood shall flow!"

LV.

Sunk the Possest One—writhing with wild throes;
And one appalling silence dusk'd the place,
As with a demon's wing. Anon, arose,
Calm as a ghost, the soothsayer: form and face
Rigid with iron sleep; and hollow fell
From stonelike lips the hateful oracle.

* Father of the Slain, Valfader.—Odin.

LVI.

"A cloud where Nornas nurse the thunder lowers;
A curse is cleaving to the Teuton race;
Before the Cross the stricken Valkyr cowers;
The Herr-god trembles on his column'd base;
A virgin's loss aroused the Teuton strife;
A virgin's love hath charm'd the Avenger's life;

LVII.

"A virgin's blood alone averts the doom;
Revives the Valkyr, and preserves the god.
Whet the quick steel—she comes, she comes, for whom
The runes glow'd blood-red to the soothsayer's rod!
O king, whose wrath the Odin-born array'd,
Regain the lost, and yield the Christian maid!"

LVIII.

As if that voice had quicken'd some dead thing
To give it utterance, so, when ceased the sound,
The dull eye fix'd, and the faint shuddering
Stirr'd all the frame; then sudden on the ground
Fell heavily the lumpish inert clay,
From which the demon noiseless rush'd away.

LIX.

Then the grey priests and the grey king creep near
The corpselike man; and sit them mutely down
In the still fire's red vaporous atmosphere;
The bubbling caldron sings and simmers on;
And thro' the reeks that from the poison rise,
Looks the wolf's blood-lust from those cruel eyes.

LX.

So sat they, musing fell;—when hark, a shout
Rang loud from rank to rank, re-echoing deep;
Hark to the tramp of multitudes without!
Near and more near the thickening tumults sweep;
King Crida wrathful rose; "what steps profane
Thy secret thresholds, Father of the Slain?"

LXI.

Frowning he strode along the lurid floors,
And loud, and loud the invading footsteps ring;
His hand impetuous flings apart the doors:—
"Who dare insult the god, and brave the king?"
Swift thro' the throng a bright-hair'd vision came;
Those stern lips falter with a daughter's name!

LXII.

Those hands uplifted, or to curse or smite,
Fold o'er a daughter's head their tremulous joy!
Oh, to the natural worship of delight,
How came the monstrous dogma—to destroy!
Sure, Heaven foreshow'd its gospel to the wild
In earth's first bond—the father and the child!

LXIII.

While words yet fail'd the bliss of that embrace,
The muttering priests, unmoved, each other eyed;
Then to the threshold came their measur'd pace:—
"Depart, Profane," their Pagán pontiff cried,
"Depart, Profane, too near your steps have trod
To altars darkened with an angry God.

LXIV.

"Dire are the omens! Skulda rides the clouds,
Her sisters tremble* at the Urdar spring;
The hour demands us—shun the veil that shrouds
The Priests, the God, the Victim, and the King."
Shuddering, the crowds retreat, and whispering low,
Spread the contagious terrors where they go.

LXV.

Then the stern Elders came to Crida's side,
And from their lock'd embrace unclasp'd his hands:
"Lo," said their chieftain, "how the gods provide
Themselves the offering which the shrine demands!
By Odin's son be Odin's voice obey'd;
The lost is found—behold, and yield the maid!"

LXVI.

As when some hermit saint, in the old day
Of the soul's giant war with Solitude,
From some bright dream which rapt his life away
Amidst the spheres—unclosed his eyes, and view'd,
'Twixt sleep and waking, vaguely horrible,
The grisly tempter of the gothic hell;

LXVII.

So, on the father's bliss abruptly broke
The dreadful memory of his dismal god;
And his eyes pleading ere his terrors spoke,
Look'd round the brows of that foul brotherhood.
Then his big voice came weak and strangely mild,
"What mean those words?—why glare ye on my child?

* "Her sisters tremble," &c., that is, the other two Fates (the Present and the Past) tremble at the Well of Life.

LXVIII.

"Do ye not know her? Elders, she is mine,—
My flesh, my blood, mine age's youngest-born!
Why are ye mute? Why point to yonder shrine?
Ay,"—and here haughty with the joy of scorn,
He raised his front.—"Ay, *be* the voice obeyed!
Priests, ye forget,—it was a *Christian* maid!"

LXIX.

He ceased, and laugh'd aloud, as humbled fell
Those greedy looks, and mutteringly replied
Faint voices, "True, so said the Oracle!"
When the arch Elder, with an eager stride
Reach'd child and sire, and cried, "See Crida, there,
On the maid's breast the cross that Christians wear!"

LXX.

Those looks, those voices, thrill'd thro' Genevieve,
With fears as yet vague, shapeless, undefin'd;
"Father," she murmured, "Father, let us leave
These dismal precincts; how those eyes unkind
Freeze to my soul; sweet father, let us go;
My heart to thine would speak! why frown'st thou so?"

LXXI.

"Tear from thy breast that sign, unhappy one!
Sign to thy country's wrathful gods accurst!
Back, priests of Odin, I am Odin's son,
And she my daughter; in my war shield nurst,
Reared at your altars! Trample down the sign,
O child, and say—the Saxon's God is mine!"

LXXII.

Infant, who came to bid a war relent,
And rob ambition of its carnage-prize,
Is it on thee those sombre brows are bent?
For thee the death-greed in those ravening eyes?
Thy task undone, thy gentle prayer unspoken?
Ay, press the cross: it is the martyr's token!

LXXIII.

She press'd the cross with one firm faithful hand,
While one—(*that* trembled!)—clasp'd her father's knees;
As clings a wretch, that sinks in sight of land,
To reeds swept with him down the weltering seas,
And murmured, "Pardon; Him whose agony
Was earth's salvation, I may not deny!

LXXIV.

"Him who gave God the name I give to thee,
'FATHER,'—in Him, in Christ, is my belief!"
Then Crida turned unto the priests,—"Ye see,"
Smiling, he said, "that I have done with grief:
Behold the victim! be the God obey'd!
The son of Odin dooms the Christian maid!"

LXXV.

He said, and from his robe he wrench'd the hand,
And, where the gloom was darkest, stalk'd away.
But whispering low, still pause the hellish band;
And dread lest Nature yet redeem the prey,
And deem it wise against such chance to arm
The priesthood's puissance with the host's alarm;

LXXVI.

To bruit abroad the dark oracular threats,
From which the Virgin's blood alone can save;
Gird with infuriate fears the murtherous nets,
And plant an army to secure a grave;
The whispers cease—the doors one gleam of day
Give—and then close;—the blood hound slinks away.

LXXVII.

Around the victim—where, with wandering hand,
Tho' her blind tears, she seems to search thro' space,
For him who had forsaken,—circling stand
The solemn butchers; calm in every face
And death in every heart; till from the belt
Stretched one lean hand and grasp'd her where she knelt.

LXXVIII.

And her wild shriek went forth and smote the shrine,
Which echoed, shrilling back the sharp despair,
Thro' the waste gaps between the shafts of pine
To the' unseen father's ear. Before the glare
Of the weird fire, the sacrifice they chain
To stones impress'd with rune and shamble-stain.

LXXIX.

Then wait (for so their formal rites compel)
Till from the trance that still his senses seals,
Awakes the soothsayer of the oracle;
At length with tortured spasms, and slowly, steals
Back the reluctant life—slow as it creeps
To one hard-rescued from the drowning deeps.

LXXX.

And when from dim, uncertain, swimming eyes
The gaunt long fingers put the shaggy hair,
And on the priests, the shrine, the sacrifice,
Dwelt the fixed sternness of the glassy stare,
Before the god they led the demon-man,
And, circling round the two, their hymn began.

LXXXI.

So rapt in their remorseless ecstacy,
They did not hear the quick steps at the door,
Nor that loud knock, nor that impatient cry;
Till shook,—till crash'd, the portals on the floor,—
Crash'd to the strong hand of the fiery thane;
And Harold's stride came clanging up the fane.—

LXXXII.

But from his side bounded a shape as light
As forms that glide thro' Elfheim's limber air;
Swift to the shrine—where on those robes of white
The gloomy hell fires scowled their sullen glare,
Thro' the death-chaunting choir,—she sprang,—she prest,
And bowed her head upon the victim's breast;

LXXXIII.

And cried, "With thee, with thee, to live or die,
With thee, my Genevieve!" the Elders raised
Their hands in wrath, when from as stern an eye
And brow erect as theirs, they shrunk amazed—
And Harold spoke, "Ye priests of Odin, hear!
Your gods are mine, their voices I revere.

LXXXIV.

"Voices in winds, in groves, in hollow caves,
Oracular dream, or runic galdra sought;
But ages ere from Don's ancestral waves
Such wizard signs the Scythian Odin brought,
A voice that needs no priesthood's sacred art,
Some earlier God placed in the human heart.

LXXXV.

"I bow to charms that doom embattled walls;
To dreams revealing no unworthy foe;
A warrior's god in Glory's clarion calls;
Where war-steeds snort, and hurtling standards flow;
But when weak women for strong men must die,
My Man's proud nature gives your Gods the lie!

LXXXVI.

"If,—not yon seer by fumes and dreams beguil'd,
But, Odin's self stood where his image stands,
Against the god I would protect my child!
Ha, Crida!—come!—*thy* child in chains!—those hands
Lifted to smite!—and thou, whose kingly bann
Arms nations,—wake, O statue, into man!"

LXXXVII.

For from his lair, and to his liegeman's side
Had Crida listening strode: When ceased the Thane,
His voice, comprest and tremulous, replied,—
"The life thou plead'st for doth these shrines profane.
In Odin's son a father lives no more;
Yon maid adores the God our foes adore."

LXXXVIII.

"And I—and I, stern king!"—Genevra cries,
"Her God is mine, and if that faith is crime,
Be just—and take a twofold sacrifice!"
"Cease," cried the Thane,—"is this, ye Powers, a time
For kings and chiefs to lean on idle blades,—
Our leaders dreamers, and our victims maids?

LXXXIX.

"Be varying gods by varying tribes addrest,
I scorn no gods that worthy foes adore;
Brave was the arm that humbled Harold's crest,
And large the heart that did his child restore.
To all the valiant Gladsheim's Halls unclose*;
In Heaven the comrades were on Earth the foes.

XC.

"And if our Gods are wrath, what wonder, when
Their traitor priests creep whispering coward fears;
Unnerve the arms and rot the hearts of men,
And filch the conquest from victorious spears?—
Yes, reverend Elders, *one* such priest I found,
And cheer'd my bandogs on the meaner hound!"

XCI.

"Be dumb, blasphemer," cried the Pontiff seer,
"Depart, or dread the vengeance of the shrine;
Depart, or armies from these floors shall hear
How chiefs can mock what nations deem divine;
Then, let her Christian faith thy daughter boast,
And brave the answer of the Teuton host!"

* GLADSHEIM, Heaven; Walhalla, ("the Hall of the Chosen,") did not exclude brave foes who fell in battle.

XCII.

A paler hue shot o'er the hardy face
Of the great Earl, as thus the Elder spoke;
But calm he answered, "Summon Odin's race;
On me and mine the Teuton's wrath invoke!
Let shuddering fathers learn what priests can dream,
And warriors judge if *I* their Gods blaspheme!

XCIII.

"But peace, and hearken.—To the king I speak:—
With mine own lithsmen, and such willing aid
As Harold's tromps arouse,—yon walls I seek;
Be Cymri's throne the ransom of the maid.
On Carduel's wall, if Saxon standards wave,
Let Odin's arms the needless victim save!

XCIV.

"Grant me till noon to prove what men are worth,
Who serve the War God by the warlike deed;
Refuse me this, King Crida, and henceforth
Let chiefs more prized the Mercian armies lead;
For I, blunt Harold, join no cause with those
Who, wolves for victims, are as hares to foes!"

XCV.

Scornful he ceased, and leaned upon his sword;
Whispering the Priests, and silent Crida, stood.
A living Thor to that barbarian horde
Was the bold Thane,—and ev'n the men of blood
Felt Harold's loss amid the host's dismay
Would rend the clasp that link'd the wild array.

XCVI.

At length out spoke the priestly chief, "The gods
Endure the boasts, to bow the pride, of men;
The Well of Wisdom sinks in Hell's abode;
The Læca shines beside the bautasten*,
And Truth too oft illumes the eyes that scorned
In the death-flash from which in vain it warned.

XCVII.

"Be the delay the pride of man demands
Vouchsafed, the nothingness of man to show!
The gods unsoftened, march thy futile bands:
Till noon we spare the victim;—seek the foe!
But when with equal shadows rests the sun—
The altar reddens, or the walls are own!"

XCVIII.

"So be it," the Thane replied, and sternly smil'd;
Then towards the sister-twain, with pitying brow,
Whispering he came,—"Fair friend of Harold's child,
Let our own gods at least be with thee now;
Pray that the Asas bless the Teuton strife,
And guide the swords that strike for thy sweet life."

XCIX.

"Alas!" cried Genevieve, "Christ came to save,
Not slay: He taught the weakest how to die;
For me, for *me*, a nation glut the grave!
That nation Christ's, and—No, the victim *I!*
Not now for *life*, my father, see me kneel,
But one kind look,—and then, how blunt the steel!"

* The SCIN LÆCA, or shining corpse, that was seen before the bautasten, or burial-stone of a dead hero, was supposed to possess prophetic powers, and to guard the treasures of the grave.

C.

And Crida moved not! Moist were Harold's eyes;
Bending, he whisper'd in Genevra's ear,
"Thy presence is her safety! Time denies
All words but these;—hope in the brave; revere
The gods they serve;—by acts our faith we test;
The holiest gods are where the men are best."

CI.

With this he turned, "Ye priests," he called aloud,
"On every head within these walls, I set
Dread weregeld for the compact; blood for blood!"
Then o'er his brows he closed his bassinet,
Shook the black death-pomp of his shadowy plume,
And his arm'd stride was lost amidst the gloom.—

CII.

And still poor Genevieve with mournful eyes
Gazed on the father, whose averted brows
Had more of darkness for her soul than lies
Under the lids of death. The murmurous
And lurid air buzz'd with a ghostlike sound
From patient Murder's iron lip;—and round

CIII.

The delicate form which, like a Psyche, seemed
Beauty sublimed into the type of soul,
Fresh from such stars as ne'er on Paphos beamed,
When first on Love the chastening vision stole,—
The sister virgin coil'd her clasp of woe;
Ev'n as that Sorrow which the Soul must know

CIV.

Till Soul and Love meet never more to part.
At last, from under his wide mantle's fold,
The strain'd arms lock'd on his loud-beating heart,
(As if the anguish which the king controll'd,
The man could stifle,)—Crida toss'd on high;—
And nature conquer'd in the father's cry!

CV.

Over the kneeling form swept his grey hair;
On the soft upturned eyes prest his wild kiss;
And then recoiling with a livid stare,
He faced the priests, and muttered, "Dotage this!
Crida is old,—come—come," and from the ring
Beckoned their chief, and went forth tottering.

CVI.

Out of the fane, up where the stair of pine
Wound to the summit of the camp's rough tower,
King Crida passed. On moving armour shine
The healthful beams of the fresh morning hour;
He hears the barb's shrill neigh,—the clarion's swell,
And half his armies march to Carduel.

CVII.

Far in the van, like Odin's fatal bird
Wing'd for its feast, sails Harold's raven plume.
Now from the city's heart a shout is heard,
Wall, bastion, tower, their steel-clad life resume;
Far shout! faint forms! yet seem they loud and clear
To that strain'd eyeball and that feverish ear.

CVIII.

But not on hosts that march by Harold's side,
Gazed the stern priest, who stood with Crida there;
On sullen gloomy groups—discattered wide,
Grudging the conflict they refused to share,
Or seated round rude tents and pilëd spears;
Circling the mutter of rebellious fears;

CIX.

Or, near the temple fort, with folded arms
On their broad breasts, waiting the deed of blood;
On these he gazed—to gloat on the alarms
That made *him* monarch of that multitude!
Not one man there had pity in his eye.
And the priest smil'd,—then turned to watch the sky.

CX.

And the sky deepen'd, and the time rush'd on.
And Crida sees the ladders on the wall;
And dust-clouds gather round his gonfanon;
And thro' the dust-clouds glittering rise and fall
The meteor lights of helms, and shields, and glaives;
Up o'er the rampires mount the labouring waves;

CXI.

And joyous rings the Saxon's battle shout;
And Cymri's angel cry wails like despair;
And from the Dragon Keep a light shines out,
Calm as a single star in tortured air,
To whose high peace, aloof from storms, in vain
Looks a lost navy from the violent main.

CXII.

Now on the nearest wall the Pale Horse stands;
Now from the wall the Pale Horse lightens down;
And flash and vanish, file on file, the bands
Into the rent heart of the howling town;
And the Priest paling frown'd upon the sun,—
Though the sky deepened and the time rush'd on.

CXIII.

When from the camp around the fane, there rose
Ineffable cries of wonder, wrath, and fear,
With some strange light that scares the sunshine, glows
O'er Sabra's waves the crimson'd atmosphere,
And dun from out the widening, widening glare,
Like Hela's serpents, smoke-reeks wind thro' air.

CXIV.

Forth look'd the king, appall'd! and where his masts
Soared from the verge of the far forest-land,
He hears the crackling, as when vernal blasts
Shiver Groninga's pines—"Lo, the same hand,"
Cried the fierce priest, "which sway'd the soothsayer's rod,
Writes now the last runes of thine angry god!"

CXV.

And here and there, and wirbelling to and fro,
Confused, distraught, pale thousands spread the plain;
Some snatch their arms in haste, and yelling go
Where the fleets burn; some creep around the fane
Like herds for shelter; prone on earth lie some
Shrieking, "The Twilight of the Gods hath come!"

CXVI.

And the great glare hath reddened o'er the town,
And seems the strife it gildeth to appall;
Flock back dim straggling Saxons, gazing down
The lurid vallies from the jagged wall,
Still as on Cuthite towers Chaldean seers,
When some red portent flamed into the spheres.

CXVII.

And now from brake and copse—from combe and dell,
Gleams break;—steel flashes;—helms on helms arise;
Faint heard at first,—now near, now thunderous,—swell
The Cymrian mingled with the Baltic cries;
And, loud alike in each,—exulting came
War's noblest music—a Deliverer's name.

CXVIII.

"Arthur!—for Arthur!—Arthur is at hand!
Woe, Saxons, woe!" Then from the rampart height
Vanish'd each watcher; while the rescue-band
Sweep the clear slopes; and not a foe in sight!
And now the beacon on the Dragon keep
Springs from pale lustre into hues blood-deep:

CXIX.

And on that tower stood forth a lonely man;
Full on his form the beacon glory fell;
And joy revived each sinking Cymrian;
There, the still Prophet watched o'er Carduel!
Back o'er the walls, and back thro' gate and breach,
Now ebbs the war, like billows from the beach

CXX.

Along the battlements swift crests arise,
Swift followed by avenging, smiting brands,
And fear and flight are in the Saxon cries!
The portals vomit bands on hurtling bands;
And lo, wide streaming o'er the helms,—again
The Pale Horse flings on angry winds its mane!

CXXI.

And facing still the foe, but backward borne
By his own men, towers high one kingliest chief;
Deep thro' the distance roll his shout of scorn,
And the grand anguish of a hero's grief.
Bounded the Priest!—"The Gods are heard at last!—
Proud Harold flyeth;—and the noon is past!

CXXII.

"Come, Crida, come!" Up as from heavy sleep
The grey-hair'd giant raised his awful head;
As, after calmest waters, the swift leap
Of the strong torrent rushes to its bed,—
So the new passion seized and changed the form,
As if the rest had braced it for the storm.

CXXIII.

No grief was in the iron of that brow;
Age cramp'd no sinew in that mighty arm;
"Go," he said, sternly, "where it fits thee, thou:
Thy post with Odin—mine with Managarm*!
Let priests avert the dangers kings must dare;
My shrine yon Standard, and my Children—*there!*"

* MANAGARM, the Monster Wolf (symbolically, WAR). "He will be filled with the blood of men who draw near their end," &c. (PROSE EDDA.)

CXXIV.

So from the height he swept—as doth a cloud
That brings a tempest when it sinks below;
Swift strides a chief amidst the jarring crowd;
Swift in stern ranks the rent disorders grow;
Swift, as in sails becalm'd swells forth the wind,
The wide mass quickens with the one strong mind.

CXXV.

Meanwhile the victim to the Demon vow'd,
Knelt; every thought wing'd for the Angel goal,
And ev'n the terror which the form had bow'd
Search'd but new sweetness where it shook the soul.
Self was forgot, and to the Eternal Ear
Prayer but for others spoke the human fear.

CXXVI.

And when at moments from that rapt communion
With the Invisible Holy, those young arms
Clasp'd round her neck, to childhood's happy union
In the old days recalled her; such sweet charms
Did Comfort weave, that in the sister's breast
Grief like an infant sobb'd itself to rest.

CXXVII.

Up leapt the solemn priests from dull repose:
The fires were fann'd as with a sudden wind;
While shrieking loud, "Hark, hark, the conquering foes!
Haste, haste, the victim to the altar bind!"
Rush'd to the shrine the haggard Slaughter-Chief.—
As the strong gusts that whirl the fallen leaf

CXXVIII.

I' the month when wolves descend, the barbarous hands
Plunge on the prey of their delirious wrath,
Wrench'd from Genevra's clasp;—Lo, where she stands,
On earth no anchor,—is she less like Faith?
The same smile firmly sad, the same calm eye,
The same meek strength;—strength to forgive and die!

CXXIX.

"Hear us, O Odin, in this last despair!
Hear us, and save!" the Pontiff call'd aloud;
"By the Child's blood we shed, thy children spare!"
And the knife glitter'd o'er the breast that bow'd.
Dropp'd blade;—fell priest!—blood chokes a gurgling groan;
Blood,—blood *not Christian*, dyes the altarstone!

CXXX.

Deep in the DOOMER'S breast it sank—the dart;
As if from Fate it came invisibly;
Where is the hand?—from what dark hush shall start
Foeman or fiend?—no shape appalls the eye,
No sound the ear;—ice-lock'd each coward breath;
The Power the Deathsmen call'd, hath heard them—Death!

CXXXI.

While yet the stupour stuns the circle there,
Fierce shrieks—loud feet—come rushing thro' the doors;
Women with outstretch'd arms and tossing hair,
And flying warriors, shake the solemn floors;
Thick as the birds storm-driven on the decks
Of some lone ship—the last an ocean wrecks.

CXXXII.

And where on tumult, tumult whirl'd and roar'd,
Shrill'd cries, "The fires around us and behind,
And the last Fire-God, and the Flaming Sword*!"
And from without, like that destroying wind
In which the world shall perish, grides and sweeps
VICTORY—swift-cleaving thro' the battle deeps!—

CXXXIII.

VICTORY, by shouts of terrible rapture known,
Thro' crashing ranks it drives in iron rain;
Borne on the wings of fire it blazes on;
It halts its storm before the fortress fane;
And thro' the doors, and thro' the chinks of pine,
Flames its red breath upon the paling shrine.

CXXXIV.

Roused to their demon courage by the dread
Of the wild hour, the priests a voice have found;
To pious horror show their sacred dead,
Invoke the vengeance, and explore the ground
When, like the fiend in monkish legends known,
Sprang a grim image on the altar stone!

CXXXV.

The wolf's hide bristled on the shaggy breast,
Over the brows, the forest buffalo
With horn impending arm'd the grisly crest,
From which the swart eye sent its savage glow:
Long shall the Saxon dreams that shape recall,
And ghastly legends teem with tales of FAUL†!

* "And the last Fire-God and the Flaming Sword," *i.e.*, Surtur the genius, who dwells in the region of fire (Muspelheim), whose flaming sword shall vanquish the gods themselves in the last day. (PROSE EDDA.)

† FAUL is indeed the name of one of the malignant Powers peculiarly dreaded by the Saxons.[1]

CXXXVI.

Needs here to tell, that when, at Merlin's hest,
Faul led to Harold's tent the Saxon maid,
The wrathful Thane had chased the skulking priest
From the paled ranks, that evil Bode* dismay'd:—
And the grim tidings of the rite to come
Flew lip to lip thro' that awed Heathendom.

CXXXVII.

Foretaught by Merlin of her mission there,
Scarce to her father's heart Genevra sprung
Than (while most soften'd) her impassioned prayer
Pierced to its human deeps; and, roused and stung
By that keen pity, keenest in the brave,—
Strength felt why strength is given, and rush'd to save.

CXXXVIII.

Amidst those quick emotions half forgot,
Followed the tutored furtive Aleman;
On, when the portals crash'd, still heeded not,
Stole his light step behind the striding Thane.
From coign to shaft the practised glider crept,
A shadow, lost where shadows darkest slept.

CXXXIX.

And safe and screened the idol god behind,
He who once lurked to slay, kept watch to save;—
Now *there* he stood! And the same altar shrined
The wild man, the wild god! and up the nave
Flight flowed on flight; and near and loud, the name
Of 'ARTHUR' borne as on a whirlwind came.

* BODE, Saxon word for messenger.

CXL.

Down from the altar to the victim's side,
While yet shrunk back the priests—the savage leapt,
And with quick steel gash'd the strong cords that tied;
When round them both the rallying vengeance swept;
Raised every arm;—O joy!—the enchanted glaive
Shines o'er the threshold! is there time to save?

CXLI.

A torch whirls hissing thro' the air,—it falls
Into the centre of the murderous throng!
Dread herald of dread steps! the conscious halls
Quake where the falchion flames and flies along;
Tho' crowd on crowd behold the falchion cleave!—
The Silver Shield rests over Genevieve!

CXLII.

Bright as the shape that smote the Assyrian,
The fulgent splendour from the arms divine
Pal'd the hell fires round God's elected Man,
And burst like Truth upon the demon-shrine.
Among the thousands stood the Conquering One,
Still, lone, and unresisted as a sun!

CXLIII.

Now thro' the doors, commingling side by side,
Saxon and Cymrian struggle hand in hand;
For there the war, in its fast ebbing tide,
Flings its last prey—there, Crida takes his stand;
There his co-monarchs hail a funeral pyre
That opes Walhalla from the grave of fire.

CXLIV.

And as a tiger swept adown a flood
With meaner beasts, that dyes the howling water
Which whirls it onward, with a waste of blood
And gripes a stay with fangs that leave the slaughter,—
So where halts Crida, groans and falls a foe—
And deep in gore his steps receding go.

CXLV.

And his large sword has made in reeking air
Broad space (thro' which, around the golden ring
That crownlike clasps the sweep of his grey hair,)
Shine the tall helms of many a Teuton king;
Lord of the West—broad-breasted Chevaline;
And Ymrick's son of Hengist's giant line;

CXLVI.

Fierce Sibert, throned by Britain's kingliest river,
And Elrid, honoured in Northumbrian homes;
And many a sire whose stubborn soul for ever
Shadows the fields where England's thunder comes.
High o'er them all his front grey Crida rears,
As some old oak whose crest a forest clears.

CXLVII.

High o'er them all, that front fierce Arthur sees,
And knows the arch invader of the land.
Swift thro' the chiefs—swift path his falchion frees;
Corpse falls on corpse before the avenger's hand;
For fair-hair'd Ælla, Cantia's maids shall wail,
Hurl'd o'er the dead, rings Elrid's crashing mail

CXLVIII.

His follower's arms stunn'd Sibert's might receive,
And from the death-blow snatch their bleeding lord;
And now behold, O fearful Genevieve,
O'er thy doom'd father shines the charmëd sword
And shaking, as it shone, the glorious blade,
The hand for very wrath the death delay'd.

CXLIX.

"At last, at last we meet, on Cymri's soil;
And foot to foot! Destroyer of my shrines,
And murderer of my people! Ay, recoil
Before the doom thy quailing soul divines!
Ay—turn thine eyes,—nor hosts nor flight can save!
Thy foe is Arthur—and these halls thy grave!"

CL.

"Flight," laughed the king, whose glance had wandered round,
Where thro' the throng had pierced a woman's cry,
"Flight for a chief, by Saxon warriors crown'd,
And from a Walloon!—this is my reply!"
And, both hands heaving up the sword enorme,
Swept the swift orbit round the luminous form;

CLI.

Full on the gem the iron drives its course,
And shattering clinks in splinters on the floor;
The foot unsteadied by the blow's spent force,
Slides on the smoothness of the soil of gore;
Gore, quench the blood-thirst! guard, O soil, the guest!
For Freedom's heel is on the Invader's breast!

CLII.

When, swift beneath the flashing of the blade,
When, swift before the bosom of the foe,
She sprang, she came, she knelt,—the guardian maid!
And, startling vengeance from the righteous blow,
Cried, "Spare, Oh spare, this sacred life to me,
A father's life!—I would have died for thee!"

CLIII.

While thus within, the Christian God prevails,
Without the idol temple, fast and far,
Like rolling storm-wrecks, shattered by the gales,
Fly the dark fragments of the Heathen War,
Where, thro' the fires that flash from camp to wave,
Escape the land that locks them in its grave?

CLIV.

When by the Hecla of their burning fleet
Dismay'd amidst the marts of Carduel,
The Saxons rush'd without the walls to meet
The Vikings' swords, which their mad terrors swell
Into a host—assaulted, rear and van,
Scarce smote the foe before the flight began.

CLV.

In vain were Harold's voice, and name, and deeds,
Unnerved by omen, priest, and shapeless fear,
And less by man than their own barbarous creeds
Appall'd,—a God in every shout they hear,
And in their blazing barks behold unfurl'd,
The wings of Muspell* to consume the world.

* MUSPELL, Fire; the final destroyer.

CLVI.

Yet still awhile the heart of the great Thane,
And the stout few that gird the gonfanon,
Build a steel bulwark on the midmost plain,
That stems all Cymri,—so Despair fights on.
When from the camp the new volcanoes spring,
With sword and fire he comes,—the Dragon King!

CLVII.

Then all, save Harold, shriek to Hope farewell;
Melts the last barrier; through the clearing space,
On towards the camp the Cymrian chiefs compel
The ardent followers from the tempting chace;
Thro' Crida's ranks to Arthur's side they gain,
And blend two streams in one resistless main.

CLVIII.

True to his charge as chief, mid all disdain
Of recreant lithsmen—Harold's iron soul
Sees the storm sweep beyond it o'er the plain;
And lofty duties, yet on earth, control
The yearnings for Walhalla:—Where the day
Paled to the burning ships—he towered away.

CLIX.

And with him, mournful, drooping, rent and torn,
But captive not—the Pale Horse dragg'd its mane.
Beside the fire-reflecting waves, forlorn,
As ghosts that gaze on Phlegethon—the Thane
Saw listless leaning o'er the silent coasts,
The spectre wrecks of what at morn were hosts.

CLX.

Tears rush'd to burning eyes, and choked awhile
The trumpet music of his manly voice,
At length he spoke: "And are ye then so vile!
A death of straw! Is that the Teuton's choice?
By all our gods, I hail that reddening sky,
And bless the burning fleets which flight deny!

CLXI.

"Lo, yet the thunder clothes the charger's mane,
As when it crested Hengist's helmet crown!
What ye have lost—an hour can yet regain;
Life has no path so short as to renown!
Shrunk if your ranks,—when first from Albion's shore
Your sires carved kingdoms, were their numbers more?

CLXII.

"If not your valour, let your terrors speak.
Where fly?—what path can lead ye from the foes?
Where hide?—what cavern will not vengeance seek?
What shun ye? Death?—Death smites ye in repose!
Back to your king; from Hela snatch the brave—
We best escape, when most we scorn, the grave."

CLXIII.

Roused by the words, tho' half reluctant still,
The listless ranks re-form their slow array,
Sullen but stern they labour up the hill,
And gain the brow!—In smouldering embers lay
The castled camp, and slanting sunbeams shed
Light o'er the victors—quiet o'er the dead.

CLXIV.

Hush'd was the roar of war—the conquered ground
Waved with the glitter of the Cymrian spears;
The temple fort the Dragon standard crown'd;
And Christian anthems peal'd on Pagan ears;
The Mercian halts his bands—their front surveys;
No fierce eye kindles to his fiery gaze.

CLXV.

One dull, disheartened, but not dastard gloom
Clouds every brow,—like men compelled to die,
Who see no hope that can elude the doom,
Prepared to fall but powerless to defy.
Not those the ranks, yon ardent hosts to face!
The Hour had conquered earth's all conquering race.

CLXVI.

The leader paused, and into artful show.
Doubling the numbers with extended wing;
"Here halt," he said, "to yonder hosts I go
With terms of peace or war to Cymri's king."
He turned, and towards the Victor's bright array,
With tromp and herald, strode his bitter way.

CLXVII.

Before the signs to war's sublime belief
Sacred, the host disparts its hushing wave.
Moved by the sight of that renowned chief,
Joy stills the shout that might insult the brave;
And princeliest guides the stately foeman bring,
Where Odin's temple shrines the Christian king.

CLXVIII.

The North's fierce idol, roll'd in pools of blood,
Lies crush'd before the Cross of Nazareth.
Crouch'd on the splintered fragments of their god,
Silent as clouds from which the tempest's breath
Has gone,—the butchers of the priesthood rest.—
Each heavy brow bent o'er each stoney breast.

CLXIX.

Apart, the guards of Cymri stand around
The haught repose of captive Teuton kings;
With eyes disdainful of the chains that bound,
And fronts superb—as if defeat but flings
A kinglier grandeur over fallen power:—
So suns shine larger in their setting hour.

CLXX.

From these remote, unchained, unguarded, leant
On the gnarl'd pillar of the fort of pine,
The Saturn of the Titan armament,
His looks averted from the altered shrine
Whence iron Doom the Antique Faith has hurl'd,
For that new Jove who dawns upon the world!

CLXXI.

And one broad hand conceal'd the monarch's face;
And one lay calm on the low-bended head
Of the forgiving child, whose young embrace
Clasp'd that grey wreck of Empire! All had fled
The heart of pride:—Thrones, hosts, the gods! yea all
That scaled the heaven, strew'd Hades with their fall!

CLXXII.

But Natural Love, the household melody,
Steals thro' the dearth,—resettling on the breast;
The bird returning with the silenc'd sky,
Sings in the ruin, and rebuilds its nest.
Home came the Soother that the storm exil'd,—
And Crida's hand lay calm upon his child!

CLXXIII.

Beside her sister saint, Genevra kneeleth,
Mourning her father's in her Country's woes;
And near her, hushing iron footsteps, stealeth
The noblest knight the wondrous Table knows—
Whispering low comfort into thrilling ears—
When Harold's plume floats up the flash of spears.

CLXXIV.

But the proud Earl, with warning hand and eye,
Repells the yearning arms, the eager start;
Man amidst men, his haughty thoughts deny
To foes the triumph o'er his father's heart;
Quickly he turn'd—where shone amidst his ring
Of subject planets, the Hyperion King.

CLXXV.

There Tristan graceful—Agrafayn uncouth,
And Owaine comely with the battle-scar,
And Geraint's lofty age, to venturous youth
Glory and guide, as to proud ships a star,
And Gawaine, sobered to his gravest smile,—
Lean on the spears that lighten through the pile.

CLXXVI.

There stood the stoic Alemen sedate,
Blocks hewn from man, which love with life inspired;
There, by the Cross, from eyes serene with Fate,
Look'd into space the Mage! and carnage-tired,
On Ægis shields, like Jove's still'd thunders, lay
Thine ocean giants, Scandinavia!

CLXXVII.

But lo, the front, where conquest's auriole
Shone, as round Genius marching at the van
Of nations;—where the victories of the soul
Stamped Nature's masterpiece, perfected Man:
Fair as young Honour's vision of a king
Fit for bold hearts to serve, free lips to sing!

CLXXVIII.

So stood the Christian Prince in Odin's hall,
Gathering in one, Renown's converging rays;
But, in the hour of triumph, turn, from all
War's victor pomp, the memory and the gaze;
Miss that last boon the mission should achieve,
And rest where droops the dove-like Genevieve.

CLXXIX.

Now at the sight of Mercia's haughty lord,
A loftier grandeur calms yet more his brow;
And leaning lightly on his sheathless sword,
Listening he stood, while spoke the Earl:—"I bow
Not to war's fortune, but the victor's fame;
Thine is so large, it shields thy foes from shame.

CLXXX.

"Prepared for battle, proffering peace I come;
On yonder hills eno' of Saxon steel
Remains, to match the Cymrian Christendom;
Not slaves with masters, men with men would deal.
We cannot leave your land, our chiefs in gyves,—
While chains gall Saxons, Saxon war survives.

CLXXXI.

"Our kings, our women, and our priests release,
And in their name I pledge (no mean return)
A ransom worthy of both nations—Peace;
Peace with the Teuton! On your hills shall burn
No more the beacon; on your fields, no more
The steed of Hengist plunge its hoofs in gore.

CLXXXII.

"Peace while this race remains—(our sons, alas,
We cannot bind!) Peace with the Mercian men:
This is the ransom. Take it, and we pass
Friends from a foeman's soil; reject it,—then
Firm to this land we cling, as if our own,
Till the last Saxon falls, or Cymri's throne!"

CLXXXIII.

Abrupt upon the audience dies the voice,
And varying passions stir the murmurous groups;
Here, to the wiser; there, the haughtier choice:
Youth rears its crest; but age forboding droops;
Chiefs yearn for fame; the crowds to safety cling;
The murmurs hush, and thus replies the King:—

CLXXXIV.

"Foe, thy proud speech offends no manly ear.
So would I speak, could our conditions change.
Peace gives no shame, where war has brought no fear;
We fought for freedom,—we disdain revenge;
The freedom won, no cause for war remains,
And loyal Honour binds more fast than chains.

CLXXXV.

"The Peace thus proffered, with accustomed rites,
Hostage and oath, confirm, ye Teuton kings,
And ye are free! Where we, the Christians, fight,
Our Valkyrs sail with healing on their wings;
We shed no blood but for our fatherland!—
And so, frank soldier, take this soldier's hand!"

CLXXXVI.

Low o'er that conquering hand, the high-soul'd foe
Bow'd the war plum'd upon his raven crest;
Caught from those kingly words, one generous glow
Chaced Hate's last twilight from each Cymrian breast;
Humbled, the captives hear the fetters fall,
Power's tranquil shadow—mercy, awes them all!

CLXXXVII.

Dark scowl the Priests;—with vengeance Priestcraft dies!
Slow looks, where Pride yet struggles, Crida rears;
On Crida's child rest Arthur's soft'ning eyes;
And Crida's child is weeping happy tears;
And Lancelot, closer at Genevra s side,
Pales at the compact that may lose the bride.

CLXXXVIII.

When from the altar by the holy rood,
Come the deep accents of the Cymrian Mage,
Sublimely bending o'er the multitude
Thought's Atlas temples crown'd with Titan age,
O'er Druid robes the beard's broad silver streams,
As when the vision rose on virgin-dreams.

CLXXXIX.

"Hearken, ye Scythia's and Cimmeria's sons,
Whose sires alike by golden rivers dwelt,
When sate the Asas on their hunter thrones;
When Orient vales rejoiced the shepherd Celt;
While EVE's young races towards each other drawn,
Roved lingering round the Eden gates of dawn.

CXC.

"Still the old brother-bond in these new homes,
After long woes, shall bind your kindred races;
Here, the same God shall find the sacred domes;
And the same land-marks bound your resting-places,
What time, o'er realms to Heus and Thor unknown,
Both Celt and Saxon rear their common throne.

CXCI.

"Meanwhile, revere the Word the viewless Hand
Writes on the leaves of kingdom-dooming stars;
Thro' Prydain's Isle of Pines, from sea to land,
Where yet Rome's eagle leaves the thunder scars,
The sceptre-sword of Saxon kings shall reach,
And new-born nations speak the Teuton's speech;

CXCII.

"All save thy mountain empire, Dragon king!
All save the Cymrian's Ararat—Wild Wales*!
Here Cymrian bards to fame and God shall sing—
Here Cymrian freemen breathe the hardy gales,
And the same race that Heus the Guardian led,
Rise from these graves—when God awakes the dead!"

CXCIII.

The Prophet paused, and all that pomp of plumes
Bowed as the harvest which the south wind heaves,
When, while the breeze disturbs, the beam illumes,
And blessings gladden in the trembling sheaves.
He paused, and thus renewed: "Thrice happy, ye
Founders of shrines and sires of kings to be!

CXCIV.

"Hear, Harold, type of the strong Saxon soul,
Supple to truth, untameable by force,
Thy dauntless blood thro' Gwynedd's chiefs shall roll†,
Thro' Scotland's monarchs take its fiery course,
And flow with Arthur's, in the later days,
Thro' Ocean-Cæsars, either zone obeys.

---

* "Their Lord they shall praise,
And their language they shall preserve;
Their land they shall lose,
Except Wild Wales!"

PROPHECY OF TALIESSIN.

† This prediction refers to the marriage of the daughter of Griffith ap Llewellyn (Prince of Gwynedd, or North Wales, whose name and fate are not unfamiliar to those who have read the romance of "Harold, the Last of the Saxon Kings") with Fleance. From that marriage descended the Stuarts, and indeed the reigning family of Great Britain.

CXCV.

"Man of the manly heart, reward the foe
Who braved thy sword, and yet forbore thy breast,
Who loved thy child, yet could the love forego
And give the sire;—thy looks supply the rest,
I read thine answer in thy generous glance!
Stand forth—bold child of Christian Chevisaunce!"

CXCVI.

Then might ye see a sight for smiles and tears,
Young Lancelot's hand in Harold's cordial grasp,
While from his breast the frank-eyed father rears
The cheek that glows beneath the arms that clasp;
"Shrink'st thou," he said, "from bonds by fate reveal'd?—
Go—rock my grandson in the Cymrian's shield!"

CXCVII.

"And ye," the solemn voice resumed, "O kings!
Hearken, Pendragon, son of Odin hear!
There is a mystery in the heart of things,
Which Truth and Falsehood, seek alike with fear,
To Truth from heaven, to Falsehood breathed from hell,
Comes yet to both the unquiet oracle.

CXCVIII.

"Not vainly, Crida, priest, and rune, and dream,
Warned thee of fates commingling into one
The silver river and the mountain stream;
From Odin's daughter and Pendragon's son,
Shall rise the royalties of farthest years
Born to the birthright of the Saxon spears.

CXCIX.

"The bright decree that seem'd a curse to hate,
Blesses both races when fulfill'd by love;
From Cymri's Dragon England's power shall date,
And peace be born to Cymri from the Dove. (')
Eternal links let nuptial garlands weave,
And Cymri's queen be Saxon Genevieve!"

CC.

Perplexed, reluctant with the pangs of pride,
And shadowy doubts from dark religion thrown,
Stern Crida lingering turned his face aside;
Then rise the elders from the idol stone;
From fallen chains the kindred Teutons spring,
Low murmurs rustle round the moody king;

CCI.

On priest and warrior, while they whisper, dwells
The searching light of that imperious eye;
Warrior and priest, the prophet word compels;
And overmasters like a destiny—
When towards the maid the radiant conqueror drew,
And said, "Enslaver, it is mine to sue!"

CCII.

To Crida, then, "Proud chief, I do confess
The loftier attribute 'tis thine to boast.
The pride of kings is in the power to bless,
The kingliest hand is that which gives the most;
Priceless the gift I ask thee to bestow,—
But doubly royal is a generous foe!"

CCIII.

Then forth—subdued, yet stately, Crida came,
And the last hold in that rude heart was won:
"Hero, thy conquest makes no more my shame,
He shares thy glory who can call thee 'Son!'
So may this love-knot bind and bless the lands!"
Faltering he spoke—and joined the plighted hands.

CCIV.

There flock the hosts as to a holy ground,
There, where the dove at last may fold the wing!
His mission ended, and his labours crown'd,
Fair as in fable stands the Dragon King—
Below the Cross, and by his prophet's side,
With Carduel's knighthood kneeling round his bride.

CCV.

What gallant deeds in gentle lists were done,
What lutes made joyaunce sweet in jasmine bowers,
Let others tell:—Slow sets the summer sun;
Slow fall the mists, and closing, droop the flowers;
Faint in the gloaming dies the vesper bell,—
And Dream-land sleeps round golden Carduel.

NOTE TO BOOK XII.

1 "From Cymri's Dragon England's power shall date,
And peace be born to Cymri from the Dove."
Page 451, stanza cxcix.

According to Welch genealogists Arthur left no son; and I must therefore advise the believer in Merlin's prophecy to suppose that it was by a daughter that Arthur's line was continued, and the royalty of Britain restored to the Cymrian kings, through the House of Tudor; from the accession of which House may indeed be dated both the final and cordial amalgamation of the Welch with the English, and the rise of that power over the destinies of the civilized world, which England has since established. The reader will pardon me, by the way, if I have somewhat perplexed him, now and then, by a similarity between the names of "Genevieve" and "Genevra." Both are used by the writers of the French Fabliaux as synonymous with Guenever; and the more shrewd will perhaps perceive that the reason why the name of Lancelot's mistress has been made almost identical with that of Arthur's, is to vindicate the fidelity of the Cymrian Queen Guenever from that scandal which the levity of French romance has most improperly cast upon it, in connection with Lancelot. It is to be presumed that those ancient slanderers were misled by the confusion of names, and that it was his own Genevra, and not Arthur's Genevieve, who received Lancelot's homage. — But indeed my Lancelot is altogether a different personage from the Lancelot represented in the Fabliaux as Arthur's nephew.

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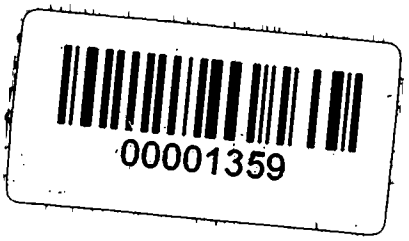
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